



Class QL 791

Book G3

Copyright N^o

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.



Fr.

Strange Creatures

IN NATURE'S SCHOOL

BY

LILIAN GASK

AUTHOR OF

"THROUGH THE GATES OF THE MOON"

"THE WONDERS OF THE ZOO" ETC.

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

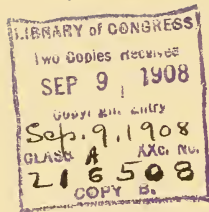
DOROTHY HARDY

3
2
3 3a
4 5
5 6
1 1

NEW YORK

THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS



COPYRIGHT, 1908
BY THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.

The Contents of Chapters

| | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| I How Phil ran away to the Woods | p. 9 |
| II At Home with the Beavers | 23 |
| III A Happy Time | 43 |
| IV Some "Little Children" | 65 |
| V A Den in the Rocks | 84 |
| VI Up in the Mountains | 102 |
| VII On Greenland's Shores | 121 |
| VIII "Lord of the Snows" | 144 |
| IX A Fragrant Land | 162 |
| X "Ships of the Desert" | 179 |
| XI "All Glory Fades" | 197 |
| XII An Unloved King | 215 |
| XIII "A Friend in the Jungle" | 232 |
| XIV "The White Queen" | 255 |
| XV "The Other Side of the World" | 276 |
| XVI Home Again | 302 |

List of Illustrations

| | PAGE |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Phil crosses the Glaciers | <i>Cover</i> |
| Strange Creatures | <i>Frontispiece</i> ✓ |
| “Did you make these?” | 28 ✓ |
| Felling the Trees | 46 ✓ |
| The Ondatras | 66 ✓ |
| A Singular Animal | 84 ✓ |
| “He was very angry” | 118 ✓ |
| “It is a Greenland Whale” | 158 ✓ |
| “Don’t you know me?” | 168 ✓ |
| Phil and Aleppo | 190 ✓ |
| “Who calls me?” | 206 ✓ |
| The Gorilla | 216 ✓ |
| “The wildest Antics” | 252 ✓ |
| The Leopard | 274 ✓ |
| Phil and the Kangaroo | 286 ✓ |
| “He started off with Phil” | 314 ✓ |

IN NATURE'S SCHOOL

Chapter the First

How Phil ran away to the Woods



HE big red Orphanage against the hill looked very grim and desolate that autumn evening when Phil first saw it. He had come such a long way—from a sheltered val-

ley where there were violets even in winter time, and the soft air only ruffled his curls and kissed him when he ran out to play. Here the wind rushed down from the heights above, almost throwing him off his feet as he left the shelter of the carrier's cart that had brought him from the station. It tossed his cap over the great iron gates that made him think of an ogre's castle.

They opened slowly at the carrier's ring; as they clanged behind him Phil drew a deep breath,

In Nature's School

and tried to remember all that "Mother" had told him about being "brave," before she went away. She was an angel now, they told him, and could not play with him any more. . . . He wished she were not an angel, for he wanted her "most dredf'ly," all day long.

"Why, the child seems dazed," said someone, as he stumbled over the threshold of the Orphanage. The matron, who was tall and dark, and had a tired face that had forgotten how to smile, took the queer-shaped bundle he had been clasp-
ing out of his arms, and gave him a little shake.

"We're not going to bite you," she said sharply. "Hold up your head, and don't shuffle your feet so. Your shoelace is undone, and your collar all to one side. I'm afraid you are a very untidy boy."

Phil looked at her timidly, and in spite of herself her stern mouth softened. The deep grey eyes that met her own so wistfully had violet shadows round them, and he seemed so little and young to be all alone among strangers.

How Phil ran away

"Can I take my brown bear to bed with me?" he asked. "He's in my parcel. His fur is real. Mother gave him to me last Crissmus."

The matron's glance grew hard again.

"Seven years old, and want to take a 'brown bear' to bed with you!" she exclaimed. "You ridiculous boy! Don't let me hear such nonsense again."

The poor brown bear was tossed aside, and Phil was told to make haste over the supper that was waiting for him on a tiny tray. The thick bread-and-butter almost choked him, but it was finished at last, and he was swept upstairs to the dormitory where he was to sleep. A row of small white beds stretched right along the wall, and from every bed a pair of eyes stared at him as he undressed. He was a long time, and the matron grew impatient.

"Your fingers are thumbs, Phil Morris," she said, and the titter that ran round the room made Phil blush red with shame. "Fold up your clothes and say your prayers," she commanded next, and

In Nature's School

Phil obeyed. A strangled sob caught in his throat as she bade him "good-night" and took away the light. The other boys, who were already planning "surprises" for him in the morning, set up a jeering chorus of "Cry, baby, cry," and a very hard pillow landed neatly on his head. It would have been followed by others but for the sound of footsteps in the passage, which induced them to leave him in peace save for whispered threats.

Phil slept but ill that night, and woke next morning to a long day of misery. He was shy and frightened, and did not understand that the boys meant nothing by their teasing; he had never been teased at home, and did not know the meaning of half they said. When he flew into a passion and tried to fight them it only made things worse; "Cross cat" they called him then, and tied his hands behind him so that he was helpless to defend himself when they pinched him or pulled his hair. Little wonder that he was "stupid" when lessons began again.

How Phil ran away

For how could he give his mind to "nine times nine" when Jack Thorp was sticking a pin into him under the desk, or think of the number of pence in thirteen shillings when the boy behind him had just dropped peas down his neck, inside the back of that stiffly starched collar which all the orphans wore? "Poor little chap, he'll brighten up in a few days," thought the youngest mistress, who was lonely herself, and would have petted him had she dared.

But Phil grew more stupid instead of brighter, and took refuge in obstinate silence when the matron tried to find out what was the matter with him. "He's the stupidest boy in the school," she said at last, when she passed through the class rooms and found him placarded as "Dunce" for the third time in one week. "The stupidest boy in the school," echoed the others; and "Stupid Phil" was his name henceforth.

Phil was too miserable to care. It seemed to him all through the winter that no one spoke to him

In Nature's School

except to tease or scold him; the small boys mocked at his babyish ways, and the elder ones bullied him as much as they dared, seizing their opportunities when they could. Jack Thorp—a thin pale boy with eyes that glittered like a snake's—was his chief tormentor; he was always thinking of fresh plots.

“Let's have some fun out of that young Phil,” he said one afternoon, and amidst delighted shouts Phil was hustled away to the big barn where they played when it was too wet to go outside. A piece of old sheeting was made into a rough bag, and in this Phil was suspended to the rafters by means of a long rope, and swung backward and forward until he was sick with terror. He was only released when the tea-bell rang, and that night he dreamt of yawning precipices and fearful chasms, into which he was dashed headlong.

Jolly Dick Brownlow, rather ashamed of himself for having joined in the fun, tried to make friends next day by means of a peace-offering of

How Phil ran away

peppermint rock rather the worse for wear. But Phil put his hand to his head and shrank away as if he feared some treachery. He could not believe that anyone meant to be kind to him, and he only wanted to be let alone.

"I believe you're half daft," cried Dick, who was angry at being repulsed; and one of the bigger boys, who happened to be passing, boxed Phil's ears "for looking such an owl," and made his head ache worse than ever.

Phil's head was always aching now, and he longed for night to come, in spite of his terror of the darkness. The sunshine, which he had loved so, made him nearly as much afraid—he could not have told you why. When lessons were over he stole away and hid in a corner behind the woodshed, where for a little while he was free from the other boys.

It was here he kept his big glass marble—the only treasure he had left—and as he rolled it noiselessly to and fro, dreading every moment lest some-

In Nature's School

one should come and take it away from him, he would wonder if any other boy had been "so mis'rubble" before. The tiny mouse he had tamed by bringing crumbs for her was his only comfort; she would run up the sleeve of his jacket and poke her cold little nose into his curled-up hand, and he loved her as fondly as he had loved his dear brown bear. "Brighteyes" he called her, and he was almost happy as she nestled against his cheek.

Jack Thorp tracked him one day; he seized the marble, and crushed the mouse with his heavy foot. The little thing died with a piteous squeak, and Phil, with the sound of this ringing in his ears, dashed round the woodshed and through the playground in a passion of fear and grief. His flight was so sudden that no one followed him for a moment; Jack had caught his jacket on a nail in the woodshed, and could not free himself without tearing it, which would have meant a forfeited holiday. Before they saw what he was after, Phil had skirted the yard, and dived into the long passage

How Phil ran away

which led to the back door. He was out of this in a moment, and skimming down the open road as if his feet had wings.

Past the post office and the church he ran; the row of cottages they called "the village" were soon left far behind. He felt as if he could run for ever, and did not stop even when by turning back he could no longer see the Orphanage in the distance.

It was springtime now, and the hedges were green with buds. The ditch into which Phil stumbled, when at last his knees gave under him, was very deep, but he fell on a patch of grass and was not hurt. Some sweet, pale primroses that had strayed from a neighbouring field looked up at him with starlike eyes as he panted for breath, and a breeze as soft as those in his old home rustled the hawthorn tree above. "Lie still and rest," it seemed to say; and Phil lay still, while footsteps passed and repassed on the road, and excited voices called his name.

"He maun be hidin' i' the village," he heard the

In Nature's School

gardener from the Orphanage cry. Then all was silent again, and the sweet, pale primroses smiled at him reassuringly.

“You’re all right now,” they murmured; and they looked as if they knew.

When the shadows were very long on the white road Phil crept out of the friendly ditch and made his way to the woods, where he knew he should find shelter. Perhaps the robins would cover him over with leaves, as they did the Babes in the Wood. He would like that, he thought.

“Dear little Phil,” cooed a ring-dove softly, as she watched him through the mist of fairy green that hid her nest. Pink-tipped anemones spread themselves in his pathway, and the blue sky looked down at him kindly through the branches overhead.

“I will stay here always,” he cried; and made himself a chain of primroses to show that he belonged to the wood.

The light in the sky grew fainter, and the snow-white cloud ships that sailed across it turned into

How Phil ran away

rosy pink and then to palest violet. A baby rabbit scrambled across his feet and made for the bank close by; the ring-doves settled themselves to rest, and ceased to coo, for they knew it would soon be dark.

Phil began to feel lonely again—so lonely that the tears he thought had been driven away for ever (for when you are most unhappy you cannot cry) rushed down his small white face, like raindrops in a hurry to reach the ground.

“O mother, I wish you’d come,” he sobbed.
“I want you so—O mother, mother. . .”

A nightingale from the depths of the coppice burst into song, and the aspens shook their branches and sighed for sympathy.

“Mother, mother,” he cried again; then his weeping ceased; for kindly arms had gathered him into a wide lap, and the sweetest eyes that he had ever seen were looking into his own.

“I am Nature, the Mother of All,” a soft voice said, “and you are my little child. . . . Why are

In Nature's School

you so unhappy, Phil? I meant you to play like the lambs in the meadows, and be as glad as they."

Then Philip told her all his troubles, nestling against her arm as a small bird nestles under its mother's wing. "I'm the stupidest boy in the school," he finished, "and nobody loves me now."

Nature gathered him to her yet more closely, and though she was silent for awhile, Phil was quite sure she would not send him back to the Orphanage, or let him be "mis'rubble" any more.

A flood of moonlight made the woods bright as day; each blade of grass was a shining spear, and the dew on the leaves glittered like diamond drops upon a sheet of silver.

"You shall come to my school," she said, "and live with my other children, the creatures of the woods and streams, of ice and snow and burning deserts. And they shall make you welcome, and be your friends, until such time as you are ready to return to the world of men."

Her voice, which had been low and gentle at

How Phil ran away

first, swelled into the sound of a great river flowing down to the sea, and ended on a long full note that was like a call, and more beautiful to listen to than any other sound . . . Swiftly and silently, as if they had journeyed far on the wings of the wind, strange creatures came from the tangle of undergrowth under the beech trees, and made obeisance to the Mother of All. A giant gorilla bent his hairy head with the gesture of a courtier who bows only to Royalty; a splendid lion with eyes of flaming amber and the sands of the desert still on his feet stood near a polar bear, the "Lord of the Snows," while a stately elephant waved his curling trunk over some curious creatures whose pictures Phil remembered he had seen. They were in the book of Natural History his mother had often read to him in the long winter evenings at home.

Phil was not frightened, but full of wonder and delight. Nature had taken his hand in hers, and now she drew him forward into the centre of the strange group.

In Nature's School

“This child of mine shall live in your midst,” she said, “and none of you shall harm him. He shall learn from you courage and foresight, and the secret of happy work and glad obedience; that you have your troubles as well as he, and bear them bravely. And his fellows shall know through him that you, even as they, are my own children, and very dear to me.”

A deep murmur, like the beating of waves against the rocks at break of day, filled the aisles of the wood as Nature ceased to speak.

“It is well,” her creatures murmured, “the boy shall learn our secrets, and none of us shall harm him. He shall wander at will amongst the forests and by the sea; for we shall remember that he too is thy child.” And swiftly and silently as they had come, they vanished into the dark again.

Then Nature laid two soft kisses on Phil's eyes, and sang to him softly. Her song seemed to come from a long way off; soon the night wind took him tenderly from her arms and bore him far away.

Chapter the Second

At Home with the Beavers



PHIL woke to find himself beside a river, under the shade of the luxuriant trees which grew to its very edge. The air was as warm as summer, and the murmur of the big brown velvet bee that hovered over a purple flower made him think of the garden at home. A tiny humming-bird, gleaming against the willows like a spot of fire, flashed quickly past him, and lingered for a moment on a swaying branch; she had travelled nearly four thousand miles on those small wings of hers to reach her summer quarters, and even now was not at her journey's end.

Phil turned his head to look at her, and as he did so he found to his great joy that the stiff white

In Nature's School

collar which the village boys had called his "pud-den plate" had disappeared. So, too, had the drab serge suit and the clumsy hob-nailed boots that had hurt him so. Instead, he wore a single garment of some soft brown, the colour of earth, girdled by a broad green belt that felt like velvet. His feet were bare, and as he buried them in the thick grass on which he lay, he sighed with pleasure.

"Good morning," remarked someone in rather hoarse tones close at his elbow, and one of the quaint animals he had seen the night before shuffled awkwardly towards him with what was evidently intended for a pleasant smile. "Mother Beaver," Nature had called her, he remembered, and he had a dim idea that she had offered to take him under her care until he knew his way about the forests. He sat up now so that he might see her better, for in the daylight she looked stranger still. Her body, nearly three feet long, was covered with glossy hair; her tail was paddle-shaped and smooth, while her strong white tusks would have given her quite

With the Beavers

a fierce expression but for her twinkling eyes. These were very bright and most inquisitive, as if she found him quite as curious as he did her.

“Good morning,” she repeated with friendly emphasis, as Phil tried in vain to think of something to say. “Where are your manners, young man? Haven’t you learnt yet that it isn’t polite to stare?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Phil, smiling shyly at her. “I never knew that animals could speak until last night, and it’s rather startling at first, you know. Do you mind telling me where I am?”

“In North America, on the banks of one of its swiftest rivers,” she returned, proudly. “You are coming to school with me, I hear. I hope you are quick and industrious—we have too many idlers already, and there’s any amount of work to be done before the autumn.”

Phil thought of his name at the Orphanage, and felt a sudden qualm of fear. It was gone in a moment; for Mother Beaver’s voice, if gruff, was kind, and he liked the way her eyes twinkled.

In Nature's School

"I'll do my best," he said. "Mother usen't to call me stupid, but everyone does now. And I s'pose I am," he sighed.

Mrs Beaver gave an odd little snort that showed the big teeth on either side of her powerful jaw.

"Those who think others stupid are generally stupid themselves," she said, flapping her scale-covered tail as she moved towards the water. "I daresay you're as bright as any, if the truth were told. Can you swim?"

Phil nodded joyfully. That was one thing, anyhow, that he could do. Even Jack Thorp, who had toppled him over into the big swimming-bath "for fun," had owned that he swam "like a fish"; an old sailor had taught him during a long happy summer he had spent by the sea, and had been quite proud of his pupil.

"Not that it would matter if you had never learnt," said Mother Beaver, struck by a sudden thought, "for Nature has made you an exception to all her rules. What is an exception? (I said 'ex-

With the Beavers

ception,' not 'essepshun,' please!). Well, you must wait until Father Beaver comes if you want it properly explained, but it means that while you are Nature's guest you will be able to do all those things that a small boy *wouldn't* be able to do in the usual way; such as breathe under water, for instance, as you will in a moment, when you come to my winter home. You will change your size, too, without knowing anything about it, just when and where it is most convenient, so that you can sit in nests, or run down burrows, as easily as the creatures to which they belong. And you'll never feel hungry, unless there is something near that you can eat, or thirsty, unless you are within easy distance of a stream. In short, my dear, Nature has been particularly kind to you for this one year; after that you'll be just an ordinary boy again."

Phil was rather bewildered; it sounded much too wonderful to be true, but Mother Beaver seemed quite in earnest.

"Are you ready?" she said. "Then follow me.

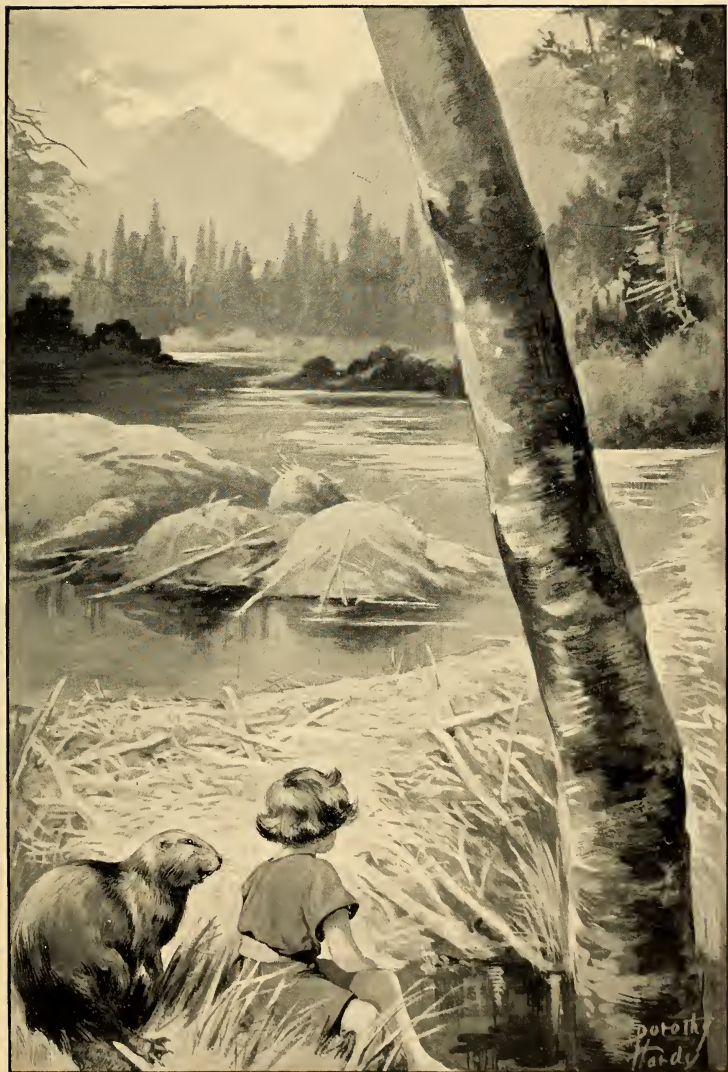
In Nature's School

We're going to my winter lodge, where my young ones are still waiting for me. Their father and I only left it this morning to look round, for spring comes suddenly here in the north, and a day or two ago it was quite cold. The flowers are in bloom, the bees say, before they have time to notice their buds, and the trees spread out their leaves in a single night. The winter has only just gone."

Phil followed her to the water's edge through clumps of rushes, and saw before him a cluster of dome-shaped houses, like giant thimbles, in the centre of the stream. Many were some feet above the surface of the water; they were covered with a smooth coating of hard mud, and so far as he could see they had no entrance.

"Did you make those?" he asked, as she led him on to the dam, so that he might get a better view of them. He was amazed that such an insignificant creature as the beaver could build such fortresses.

"Of course we did," she answered in matter-of-fact tones. "Yes—they took a long time, but we



“Did you make these?”

With the Beavers

worked together, and worked with a will. The walls you'll notice, are more than six feet thick. They have to be very strong," she added mysteriously. Phil wanted to ask her why, but she seemed so troubled that he said "How do you get in?" instead.

"Take a header and see," she told him, splashing from the dam and diving straight down, with Phil behind her, until they reached the deep projection, or "angle" as it is called, beneath which lay the entrance to her own particular home. It was very near the bed of the river, where the frost would not be likely to reach even in bitter weather.

"Here we are!" she cried, shaking the water off her tail as she scrambled through. Phil noticed that she was as agile in the water as she was clumsy on land, and that two toes on each foot were webbed.

Inside the winter house were three young beavers, all very wide awake and covered with brown and glossy fur. Their three little beds were nicely arranged along the side of the wall, much as those in the Orphanage dormitory, while two vacant

In Nature's School

ones, somewhat larger, and belonging to Father and Mother Beaver, were on the other side. The centre of the chamber was left free to move about in, and was so beautifully clean that Phil was sure Mother Beaver would be as particular about muddy boots as the matron herself. He was very glad he had left his behind him—bare feet were much more comfortable.

“Yes, my children,” Mother Beaver was saying, as she patted each affectionately, “the time has come for us to go to the woods. Your father is exploring now, so that he may know where you can find the juiciest roots, and how far it is safe to venture. He will meet us before dusk.”

She busied herself in smoothing their fur, while they stared hard at Phil. Under their shining chestnut hair was a thick soft coat of greyish brown, and Mother Beaver seemed very anxious that this should lie quite flat.

“They’re very thin,” she said, regretfully, “but then it has been a long winter, and our larder is

With the Beavers

nearly empty. We live on bark entirely when we are down here," she explained to Phil, as she made sure that all was straight before she left. "We find it very nourishing and tasty, though you might think it dry. Before the frosts come we lop off branches of willows and other trees, and sink them under layers of stones close to our houses. Last fall we laid in a larger supply than usual, for we knew the spring would be late in coming; but our neighbours had such enormous appetites that it soon went. Our neighbours? Yes—they live on the other side of our lodge; but we don't visit—it isn't our way."

With a last look round she left the winter house, and though Phil swam more quickly than he had ever done before, she and her young ones were first on the river bank.

"But we're good friends," she went on (Phil shook himself as she had done, and noticed with pleasure that his brown coat was dry in a moment), "and always work together in building or repairing our dams and houses. That's why they call

In Nature's School

us "Social" Beavers. Some cousins of ours (there are not many of them, I believe) live quite alone."

The young beavers had a fine time of it that bright spring day. Phil found them most amusing playfellows, for when they had satisfied their hunger on succulent roots and tender shoots they were quite ready for any game that he suggested. They were all in the highest spirits when Father Beaver came on the scene.

He was thinner than any of them, and much more serious. Phil was inclined to be frightened of him at first, but soon found him as kindly as the rest. He smoothed Phil's hair for him as if he were a son of his own, and asked to look at his teeth.

"H'm," he remarked thoughtfully. "They won't be much use for felling trees, but I daresay you can help us in other ways. We must set to work in the early summer," he continued, turning to Mother Beaver, "for there is a lot of rebuilding to be done this fall."

"Rebuilding?" echoed Phil. He had loved his

With the Beavers

bricks, and to make castles in the sand; building those dome-shaped houses must be great fun.

"Certainly," replied Father Beaver. "Our dam must be enlarged, and a new lodge put up. We shall want all the help we can get. Later on, when we have got up our strength, we must begin to cut those saplings."

Phil was feeling rather tired, so, while the young beavers started another game, he sat with their parents, trying to understand what they meant when they spoke of "IT."

"I feel sure IT is somewhere about," said Father Beaver moodily. "I came across IT'S traces two or three miles away."

Mother Beaver sighed. "There is no use in borrowing trouble," she said. "We must just keep a sharp look-out, and get our work done quickly. I'm glad now that we made those extra holes in the bank, though it did seem rather unnecessary at the time."

"Those holes, my son," said Father Beaver, in answer to Phil's inquiry, "lead to the deep tunnels

In Nature's School

in which we take refuge when we are pursued by our enemies. There we are comparatively safe, but in the open country or in the woods, owing to our clumsy movements on land, we are at their mercy."

His voice was gloomy, and it made Phil sad to think that such gentle animals as beavers had enemies.

"If they catch you, do they swing you up high, and make you all sick and giddy?" he asked, with a vivid recollection of the terrors of the barn.

"Worse," said the Beaver, shortly. "The hunters trap and kill us for our valuable fur, and IT—the Wolverine—actually eats us! This is why we go to so much trouble to make our houses secure, so that when the frost has hardened the thick layer of mud which we place each fall over the thatch of stones and driftwood, neither teeth nor claws can penetrate the hard surface."

Mother Beaver had shuffled off to her young ones, who were making up for the short commons of the winter by eating all the green shoots that

With the Beavers

came in their way. Their father, settling himself comfortably in the shelter of a low bush, invited Phil to sit beside him and have a chat.

"You want to learn our ways," he said, looking at him indulgently. "They are easy to understand, for though we are more skilled in building, perhaps, than other creatures, it is chiefly for our industry that we are noted. Nature has taught us to think ahead and provide for the future. I suppose you know what 'thinking ahead' means?"

"Not ezzaactly," said Phil honestly, with a longing look at the young beavers. The smallest of them appeared to have rolled himself into a round ball, and Phil couldn't help thinking what first-rate bats the others' broad tails would make.

The Beaver drew back his wandering attention with a light flap of his tail.

"One thing at a time," he counselled. "If I take the trouble to talk to you, the least you can do is to listen. . . . About looking ahead. If you had 'looked ahead' and learnt your geography the

In Nature's School

other day, instead of making paper boats in preparation time, you would have known that a continent wasn't 'a piece of land surrounded by water,' and they wouldn't have called you——"

"Don't say it!" Phil entreated, and Father Beaver laughed and changed the subject.

"The Social Beavers to which we belong," he said, "live in small colonies, and work together for the general good. A certain number of us, whom hunters call 'the Idlers,' refuse to help at all, and are satisfied to live in tunnels instead of houses. These are usually sorry for their idleness when it is too late, for they are often captured by fur hunters, who know where to look for them, and easily dig them out. That is, if IT does not find them first."

"IT?" questioned Phil, snuggling closer to Father Beaver and speaking in an awed whisper.

"The Wolverene," he amended. "My wife cannot bear the sound of his name when she is weak from fasting, so we call him 'IT' at this time of the year. He carried off our eldest daughter last sum-

With the Beavers

mer. She was proud and wilful, and would not stay by her mother's side. . . . She had a lovely tail."

"Don't you think we should be settling in for the night?" asked Mother Beaver, bustling back to them with a delicate green bough, from which she had stripped the leaves, as a tit-bit for Phil. She was surprised to hear that he was not hungry, until he reminded her how early that afternoon a dapper bee in a velvet coat had invited him to a feast of honey. The Queen of the Fairies might have envied him that meal, so exquisite were the flower-cups in which he found it.

"Of course, if you prefer honey to fresh bark," she said disappointedly. To please her Phil nibbled one end of the bough, and found it very bitter. He was thankful when her thoughts were distracted to her young ones, whose coats had to be nicely smoothed before they went to bed. Ere long they were all curled up under the thorny branches of a wild brier. Phil crept in between them, and was

In Nature's School

soon asleep, while the two old beavers watched in turn to see that all was well.

The next few weeks were a delightful holiday for Phil. Day after day he roamed the woods with the gentle beavers, making friends with the bees and squirrels, and finding out their haunts. Sometimes he caught brief glimpses of other creatures, who glanced at him shyly and scampered off. He learnt to keep a sharp look out for the dreaded Wolverine, and was so curious to see him that he almost hoped that he might come. Nature had promised that nothing should harm him, and he would protect the beavers.

Father Beaver devoted many hours to his young visitor. He told him much about woodcraft, and how Nature protected some of her weakest creatures against their foes by giving them the shape and colour of their surroundings. The little brown twig on the bough before them, he pointed out, was in reality a caterpillar which birds would have devoured long since if he had attracted their atten-

With the Beavers

tion. The small dead leaf among the vines was a gorgeous butterfly when he unfolded his wings, the under side of which were a dingy brown.

"You will find this wherever you go," said Father Beaver, "Nature always protects her own."

"How does she protect you and me?" Phil asked him curiously, only half understanding.

"By giving us our wits," said the Beaver simply. "If you don't use them it is not her fault. When you grow up strong, and wise, and fearless, you will be able to protect others as well as yourself. As for us, it was she who first taught us how to build. But for her we should be at the mercy of the Wolverine all through the winter, when he is fierce with hunger, and very strong. There is the Wild Cat, too. Sometimes we hear her tearing at our roof, and snarling with rage. It is a horrible sound to listen to on a still dark night."

"Why didn't you stay in England? There are no wild cats or wolverenes in the woods at home—

In Nature's School

only birds and rabbits, and harmless creatures such as those."

Father Beaver gnawed a strip of bark from a young birch tree before he answered. "The Wolverine is not our worst enemy," he said slowly. "Beavers were driven from your shores by Man. Yes—" as Phil gave a little start of surprise—"we used to build in many of your streams and rivers; in Wales we were well known, and I have heard that in the time of Hoel-dda, the great Welsh lawgiver, one hundred and twenty pence—then a very large sum—was offered for each Beaver's skin. You see we were much thought of even in those days, though I must say I wish it had been for something else than for our fur. We are still to be found along some of the large rivers of Europe, such as the Rhone and Danube, and in many lakes; but the Rhone Beavers are solitary animals and do not build houses, dwelling instead in burrows, which go far down into the earth."

"Do those hunters you spoke of often come after you, Father Beaver?"

With the Beavers

“Yes, my son,” said the Beaver sorrowfully, “for our fur is in greater demand than ever. In the winter, which is the ‘hunting season,’ they do their best to force our houses with heavy weapons, and if we take to the water beneath the ice, and swim to our tunnels in the river side, they sound the ice above the banks with an iron chisel, which tells their practised ears the exact spot where our holes are to be found. Then they dig us out—and that is the end of us.”

“I’m *very* sorry, dear Beaver,” Phil whispered, stroking the shining fur that brought such trouble on its possessors. “I’ll tell them all when I leave the woods how cruel it is to hunt you, and p’raps they won’t any more.”

Father Beaver smiled mournfully. “There’s always the Wolverine,” he said. “His other name is the Glutton. It just exactly suits him, for he can eat more at a sitting than any other creature of his size. How does he look? Something like a small bear, with thick coarse hair of blackish

In Nature's School

brown. Until he shows his double row of glistening teeth, you would never guess how ferocious he could be. His muzzle, as far as his eyebrows, and his large paws (they are so large that his trail is sometimes mistaken for that of a bear) are the colour of ebony. His horrible claws are as white as milk, and the natives use them for necklaces. I wish they had them all," he finished with a deep sigh. "I can't help thinking he'll pounce on us some day soon."

But nothing was seen of the Wolverine as time went on, and Father Beaver became quite gay. His coat filled out, and grew more glossy than ever; he would be "a portly old gentleman" before long, Mother Beaver told him; and at this he began to talk of tree-felling, for he did not like the idea of losing his figure.

"There is a time for work and a time for play," said Mother Beaver, looking smilingly at her young ones. "The time for work has not come yet, though it will soon be here. Let them play in the sunshine yet awhile."

Chapter the Third

A Happy Time



HIL'S limbs were strong and sturdy now, and his cheeks rosy instead of pale. The long glad days in the open air had made him bold and fearless; he had forgotten how to be afraid, and even when the moon was hidden, and the little twinkling stars were keeping her company behind the clouds, night had no terrors for him. If he woke, it was just to take a long breath of the scented darkness, and go to sleep again.

"I am so glad you found me," he would whisper to Nature, whom he knew was very near; and his last thought in the evening was of the joys of another day. He quenched his thirst at

In Nature's School

the rippling streams that trickled through the woods, and no other water had ever tasted so sweet to him; the bees gave him honey, and the squirrels shared their nuts, while if he wanted more, Mother Beaver was always ready to find him succulent roots, and the birds to show him which wild berries he might eat with safety.

Father Beaver had left his family to its own devices for some time; he had been exploring the winding river, and diving under waterfalls in sheer delight at his own strength. He was full grown now, and fond as he was of his little wife and children, the roaming instinct was strong. The morning he rejoined them he was in great form.

“What have you been doing with yourself?” inquired Mother Beaver, eyeing him suspiciously, when she had told him all her news. The glossy fur at the back of his neck bore marks of recent bites, and there was an ugly tear in one of his ears.

Father Beaver looked at the sky.

“There is a lovely maple tree not far from here,”

A Happy Time

he said, as if he had not heard her question. "I girdled it on my way back just now, and you'll find plenty of syrup oozing from it if you go there to-morrow."

The young beavers sniffed eagerly, but Mother Beaver was not to be put off.

"You have met the Otter," she cried, her eyes growing very big, "and you've been fighting."

Father Beaver chuckled. "Last summer," he said, turning to Phil, "I was only two years old, and that Otter punished me so severely that but for Mother Beaver there, who came to my rescue in the nick of time, I should have been done for. But now—well, he will never trouble me again!"

Phil looked at him with a new reverence. The Otter, he knew, was a fierce foe to beavers, with whom he disputed the lordship of the river; that Father Beaver should have conquered him single handed filled him with awe.

"Let us hear all about it!" cried Mother Beaver,

In Nature's School

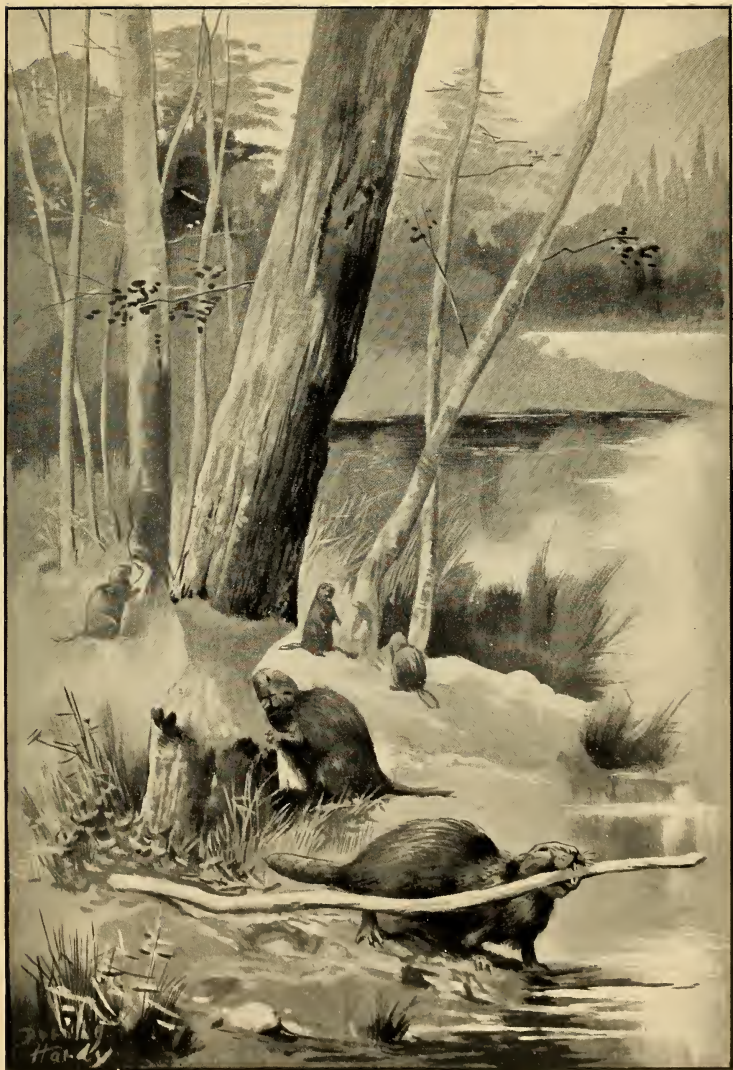
coming quite close to him. But he brushed her aside good-humouredly, and spoke of other things.

"The night wind says that the frosts will come early this fall," he remarked, "and we are well into the summer now. There is a fine plantation of willows on the river-bank, only waiting for us to fell them. We will get to work at once. I shall be right down glad to begin."

"So shall we all," said Mother Beaver heartily. "Holiday-making is well enough for a while, but if we did not use our teeth on something harder than soft bark and lily roots, they would soon grow dull."

"Yours are as bright as the gleam of the moon on the water, my love," said Father Beaver with a glance of admiration; and Mother Beaver gave him an affectionate push, which was as near to a hug as she could go.

When they reached the group of trees that Father Beaver had planned to attack first, other beavers belonging to the colony were already at work. These nodded kindly to Phil, but were too



Felling the Trees

A Happy Time

much absorbed in what they were at to take much notice of him. Mother Beaver was deputed to see what he could do, while the young beavers were given a first lesson by their proud father.

Choosing a stout young sapling very close to the bank, Mother Beaver gnawed round it with her sharp, chisel-like teeth, taking care to bite most deeply on the side nearest the water, so that it might fall towards the stream and be quickly floated. In a very few moments it toppled over, cut clean through, and Mother Beaver looked round for another.

“We’ll try that big one over there,” she cried, with an approving glance at her young ones, who were hard at work on some slender willows. Phil hesitated and flushed, for he did not know how to begin. Mother Beaver touched him pityingly with her small forepaw.

“I forgot your teeth were so small and weak, my dear. It’s not your fault, so you need not be ashamed. When I have felled the tree, you shall

In Nature's School

drag it down to the bank. That will be a great help, and leave us free for felling."

The tree took much longer to fell than the sapling had done, for the trunk was nearly as thick as a man's body. Phil was immensely interested to see how Mother Beaver set about her task; he had guessed from the first that she was remarkably clever, but now he was quite sure of it.

First of all she made a deep cut through the bark which circled the trunk as far from the ground as she could conveniently reach. Some three or four inches lower she cut a second ring, and then, slowly and surely, dug out the wood from between, splinter by splinter, with those sharp teeth of hers.

The day wore on, and still she worked. Father Beaver offered to help her; each time he came she sent him back. It was growing dusk; Phil saw that now the trunk of the tree between the cuts went in like a lady's waist. Each time that Mother Beaver drew out a splinter this "waist" became more slender still; a very little further, and the

A Happy Time

tree would have been cut right through, but Mother Beaver knew when to stop.

"Come away," she cried quickly to Phil; "at the next gust of wind that tree will fall, and only foolish creatures run knowingly into danger. I should be crushed beneath it if I drew out another splinter. Some of our family have already met their deaths that way; they were too impulsive, and did not stop to think."

The night wind came singing through the forest, and the branches of the big tree quivered; with a low groan it crashed to earth, and Phil found that it took all his new strength to drag the heavy mass down to the bank.

"I s'pose you'll all take a rest now," he said persuasively, for he was longing to hear about Father Beaver's encounter with the otter, and thought that he would not mind trying some of that maple syrup himself. But the beavers were only just getting into their work, as they told him gaily, though he, of course, might take a nap.

In Nature's School

They were still at it when he awoke next morning.

"We shall go on until not a tree on this spot is left standing," Mother Beaver declared, cheerfully; and he quite believed her.

By the afternoon his arms began to ache, and the beavers had found him so useful that one of the elders of the colony had remarked that he should have nothing to say against it if he wished to stay with them altogether. Phil thought this very kind of him; but, much as he liked the beavers, there were many other animals that he wanted to meet. Perhaps Mother Beaver guessed something of this, for she told him pleasantly to go off to the woods.

"You'll work all the better to-morrow," she said; and Father Beaver flapped his tail by way of dismissal.

As neither she nor their father would hear of the young beavers taking a holiday too, Phil wandered off by himself into the depths of the

A Happy Time

forest, where the beautiful golden sunlight, which had much ado to force its way through the thick leaves, was making long ladders on the moss. Some small red berries, quite sweet and tasting like strawberry cream, drew him further and further in; a squirrel threw him a nut and turned aside, as if too lazy to play, and a drowsy bee mistook his yellow head for honey, much to her own dismay. Phil felt uncommonly drowsy himself, in spite of his long night's rest, and was thinking of taking forty winks when a gentle rustle in the branches made him look up quickly. It was the Wolverine.

For a moment Phil thought that he must be mistaken; surely that benign looking animal, so very like his own brown bear, could not be the beaver's voracious enemy? He was patting the boughs as a playful kitten might have done, and rolling himself over with surprising ease. His small brown eyes gazed at Phil good-naturedly, as if to read his thoughts.

In Nature's School

“I don’t look such a desperate character, do I?” he asked complacently. “My wife—I must really introduce you to her—thinks I am quite a fine fellow, and my two young sons adore me. I’ll take you home to supper, and you shall see them. They are barely ten days old.”

Phil was very curious to see the young wolverenes, but somehow he did not think it would be fair to the beavers to be on such friendly terms with an animal that ate them. So he thanked him most politely and said he must be going on.

The Wolverine left off his playful patting of the branches and showed his teeth in an ugly smile.

“All right,” he said resentfully. “I know what that means, of course. The beavers have been setting you against me, just as I thought. They had better look out, for I have only been waiting until they grew a bit fatter. That “Father Beaver” of yours will make me a remarkably good supper.

A Happy Time

Give him my love if you happen to see him."

He leapt as he spoke from the upper branch of one tree to the lower branch of another, a distance of some twenty feet, and disappeared. A low chuckle came from the ground close by, and Phil was delighted to see a small brown rabbit, exactly like those that had played in the woods at home, sitting up on his hind legs. He was shaking with laughter, and his comical little nose was wrinkled up until it nearly met his eyes.

"Good for you!" he cried. "That Wolverine is a terror—I know him well. He would question and cross-question you about the beavers until you were nearly addled, and then he would persuade them that you had been telling tales. Mischievous creatures such as he are best left alone, even if you are sure they cannot harm you. He is as much hated by sable and marten hunters as he is by all of us, for he has such a wonderful sense of smell that he scents out the stores of provisions they

In Nature's School

hide in case of need, and wastes all that he does not eat. He makes their traps useless, too—but that isn't to save the sables, but because he wants the bait. The only creatures that can get the better of him are the Grizzlies; when they come down from the mountains they make a meal of him."

Not until the rabbit had talked himself out of breath had Phil a chance of asking him the shortest way back to the river.

"Won't you let us give you a shake-down for the night?" he said by way of answer. "Our burrow is large enough to take you in, and I could tell you many stories of these woods."

"I'll come some other time, if you don't mind," said Phil. "I should like to find the beavers now, and put them on their guard."

"Quite so!" agreed the rabbit. "I shouldn't be surprised if that old rascal paid them a visit to-night. He'll guess their whereabouts from the trees they have cut down, and will try to punish you through them."

A Happy Time

Phil hurried back as quickly as his legs could carry him, not even stopping to look at the splendid birds that fluttered amongst the vines. A gorgeous butterfly, spotted with crimson and purple, offered his services as a guide, but it was almost dusk before Phil reached the little colony of beavers.

They were still working away, as busily as ever. Although he had only been gone a few hours, they had done wonders; more than half of the group of trees they had chosen were already down, for they had "worked together, and worked with a will," as Mother Beaver had said.

Phil's news was received with much concern, and Father Beaver hastily summoned a conference. All beavers under a year old were at once dismissed from work, and commanded to wait by the entrances to the tunnels beneath the banks, so that in case of surprise they might be under cover, and Phil was posted as sentinel while the elder beavers finished felling the trees they had already begun. This done, they decided to leave them where they

In Nature's School

were for the present, and to make for the other side of the river.

Father Beaver was the last to cross; as he dived from the bank there was a stealthy tread among the rushes, and the gleaming eyes of the Wolverine followed him through the water. But for Phil's warning there would have been at least one beaver less that night.

It was some days before the busy little animals began their work again, for they knew that the Wolverine might still be on the watch for them, and have crossed the river himself. So they "lay very low," as Father Beaver put it, keeping to the thick undergrowth of the brushwood, or playing hide-and-seek with their young ones in the deeply tunnelled banks. Phil soon found that though each tunnel had a separate entrance, they all led to the same spot, within easy reach of the winter houses. He was never tired of admiring these, but Father Beaver brushed his praise aside, so far as they were concerned.

A Happy Time .

“Come and look at our dam,” he said. “It’s a very fine one, though perhaps I ought not to say so.” The dam stretched quite two-thirds across the river, and was curved, somewhat in the shape of a half crescent.

“That is because the current here is very rapid.” explained the beaver, “and an arch is stronger than a straight line, as your own bridge builders know. If the current were gentle, our dam would be straight, and this would give us much less trouble. But a rapid current is very useful, for if we have to go any distance for our building materials, it brings them quickly down to us, without any special effort on our part.”

“So that was why we carried all the trees that you had felled quite close to the river bank?”

“Exactly. When we are ready to build we shall push all those into the current, and some of us will be waiting by our dam to stop them as they float past. See how the branches of the willow are sprouting!”

In Nature's School

They had reached the dam by this time; it seemed to Phil like a thick hedgerow on a solid bank, for not only were the willow branches in full leaf, but the poplars and birches, used to repair it from time to time, had taken root also.

“If the snow on the mountains melts too rapidly, and flows down to the river in torrents, the water behind our dam is still quite calm, and our houses, built in its shelter, are undisturbed. We must always have a deep body of water in which to build our lodges; so when we take a fancy to some small river or creek in which the water is likely to be drained off at any time, Nature teaches us to build our dam right across the river, in order that we may prevent this.”

“How do you start building the dam?” asked Phil.

“If we are going to build a straight one, we guide two of the largest trees that we have felled to the spot we have chosen, placing them side by side, and leaving a space between. If some of their

A Happy Time

branches make them lie too high for our purpose, we nibble these off, working under water quite easily, and coming up every few minutes to breathe. (No—not more often than that, I assure you. Nature has arranged this for us, so that we can more easily escape our enemies.) These branches we place vertically in front of the big logs, adding other branches and small trees in the same way. Most of our wood, however, we lay crosswise, and almost horizontally. The spaces in between are filled with mud and stones, which we mix together to form a kind of cement. We bring the mud in tiny handfuls, holding it under our throats by means of our forepaws, and often making as many as a thousand journeys backward and forward from the bank before we have enough. We always build by night, you know, and for a long time no man could say just how we worked. Perhaps the night wind told in the end.”

“How do you manage when you want your dam to be curved, as this one is?” asked Phil.

“Then we use smaller logs in the same way,

In Nature's School

shaping the dam as we work. You would not believe the strength of ours, unless you saw how it stood the shock of the floating ice as it came pounding against it at the end of the winter. Our houses we build in much the same way, but more roughly."

"I think they're wonderful," said Phil respectfully, and Father Beaver, trying not to look too pleased, moved his flat tail and cried "Tut, tut!"

"The night wind told me a wonderful story the other day—that some eight or nine years ago an Englishman took some Social Beavers to a beautiful valley in his park in England, setting them free by the banks of a stream, where the trees grew thickly down to the very edge of the water, just as they do here. These beavers, she says, set to work at once to build a dam across the stream, making a deep wide pool six times as large as the original brook, and six times as deep at the lower end."

"I wonder if it is true?" mused Phil.

"I believe anything that the night wind tells me," said Father Beaver, thoughtfully. "She talks

A Happy Time

to us often when the sun goes down; sometimes she is merry, and sometimes sad, but always what she says is true. She brings the scent of the hunters in time to warn us that they are on our track; she knows when the frosts are coming, and when it is safe for us to leave our winter houses and take to the woods. For Nature often sends us messages through her. Of what are you thinking? Eh?"

Phil's thoughts had been wandering, and the Beaver's sharp eyes had found him out.

"I was thinking about that Otter," he said, truthfully. "I want to know how an Otter looks."

"Oh! That just depends where you happen to be when you see him. If you are on land, he seems to be a slender animal some three feet or so in length, covered with close brown fur, and with a broad and flattened head, and a thick, tapering tail; if you see him in the water, diving after the fish on which he feeds, he looks like a flash of lightning! For the water clings to the long shining hairs which lie over his close coat, and he glides

In Nature's School

through the stream so quickly that your eye can scarcely follow him. He is a brave creature; he will fight to the death when he is attacked—and a brave enemy should be honoured, even in death.”

“How did you kill him, Father Beaver? Do tell me—I have been wanting to know all day.”

“*I* didn’t kill him at all, my son,” Father Beaver replied serenely. “He had fastened on me with his sharp teeth before I knew that he was near, and I was doing my best to get free of him when another Otter, a rival of his, seized him from behind and dragged him off to fight him on his own account. I retired to a safe distance and watched the battle. It lasted until one was killed outright and the other mortally wounded. They will never trouble our waters more.”

“Oh,” said Phil. He was rather disappointed that the Beaver had not killed his enemy in single combat; Father Beaver seemed quite satisfied, however.

“There are so many of her creatures that Na-

A Happy Time

ture wishes you to make friends with," he went on as he took another admiring look at his dam, "that I don't suppose you will be allowed to stay with us much longer. But before you leave this part of the country, you must certainly pay a visit to the Ondatras, or Musk Rats. We don't care for them as neighbours, for they are apt to make holes in our dams, but they are quite well-meaning and intelligent. They build much as we do, though their work is not so lasting. And because they are gentle and very timid, Nature made them, you'll see, the colour of mud, so that when they are curled up and at rest on the bank of a stream, they are often mistaken for small mounds of earth. There is a colony of Ondatras in a shallow creek some miles away. You will see them at their best at night, for they are sleepy during the day time."

All the time he had been speaking, Father Beaver had been looking up and down the banks for traces of the Wolverine. The birds called "Good-night" to each other from the glowing

In Nature's School

maples; the crimson lights of the sunset fell over the river, and the new moon hung her shining crescent on the top of a giant fir.

“I think all’s safe,” said Father Beaver; and the work of tree-felling began again.

Chapter the Fourth

Some "Little Children"



THAT very same evening Phil made his way to the home of the Musk Rats, or Ondatras. As he neared the creek the Beaver had pointed out to him, he saw a number of animals the size of big rats, with tails that were almost as long as their bodies, swimming hither and thither, and leaving trails of silver behind them. Others stood motionless upon the bank; so still were they that it was only their sparkling eyes that showed they were alive, until, with a sudden plunge, they dived after their companions, striking their long tails smartly on the water as the beavers did, and reappearing from beneath the broad green leaves of the water lilies on the other side.

In Nature's School

Phil watched them silently for a time. They were like school boys, he thought, and he wondered what game they were playing. Sometimes a musk rat would lie quite flat on the surface of the stream, as if he were a floating leaf from some giant tree; in a moment he would be all life again, and, darting after his playmates, would race them round the creek.

“I think it would be very nice to be a musk rat,” said Phil aloud, moving a little nearer the bank. In a second the creek was empty—not a single ondatra was to be seen. Phil felt so disappointed that he was almost inclined to cry.

The water still rippled in the moonlight; all was still. Presently a small brown head peeped out of a hole in the bank. Phil did not stir; he was afraid to breathe lest he might frighten the little thing away.

“Who is it?” cried a timid voice.

“A friend!” said Phil. And more small heads peeped at him questioningly.



The Ondatras

Some Little Children

“Why, it’s that child of Nature’s,” said a muskrat suddenly; “the lonesome boy who had no one to care for him.” And a slender little creature with a small head and silken fur hurried towards him, full of apologies for not having recognised him before.

“I am the Lady Ondatra,” she cried, “and you are indeed most welcome. Will you join in our sports? The water is very smooth to-night, and as warm as milk.”

Phil was nothing loth. He was the same size now as they were, and could dive with the best of them; it was delightful to float on the surface of the water and watch the clouds chasing each other over the deep blue vault of the sky. The cry of the night owl came dreamily from the woods; a prowling Puma roared hungrily to his mate, but the pond of the muskrat was a happy playground, and they the merriest of comrades.

The hours flew by and the moonlight faded; the tips of the far off mountains were tinged

In Nature's School

with pink, and a bird in the distance raised his morning song.

"It is time to go!" cried the Lady Ondatra to Phil; "come with me; I will show you my nest."

Phil found that it was exactly as the beaver had told him, and that he could follow the Lady Ondatra quite easily through the winding tunnels, or branched canals, which had their entrances under the water. The one through which the Ondatra led him sloped upward gradually for quite a long distance; it ended in a wide chamber in which there were three other openings. The centre of it was nearly filled by a luxurious couch of water-lily leaves and sedges, where, curled up snugly and fast asleep, four baby ondatras lay with their faces hidden. They were like little beavers, Phil thought, and just about the size of full-grown mice.

Their mother spoke in a hushed whisper lest she should disturb them.

"I'm glad that you think we are pleasant creatures," she said. "We do harm to no one, and live on

Some Little Children

roots and leaves, perfectly happy if we are but let alone. We dread the fall—it is then that the hunters most often come, though sometimes they visit us in the spring. Ah me!”

“Are they after you, too?” cried Phil compassionately. “You are so small that I shouldn’t have thought your skins would be much good to them!”

“Our fur, which is used in making hats, is highly esteemed,” said the Lady Ondatra stiffly, “and our flesh, though musky, of such excellent flavour that the natives prefer us to wild duck.”

Phil guessed that she was hurt, and did his best to soothe her by admiring her babies. No mother could have resisted this.

“Tell me all about the hunters—that is, if you don’t mind,” he said with diffidence, when they had quite made friends.

The Lady Ondatra did not mind. She seemed to take a fearful joy in describing the perils she had escaped, though she knew quite well that when

In Nature's School

the summer was over she might have to go through them all again.

“Sometimes they take us in traps,” she said, “which they arrange so that in our struggles for freedom we are jerked into the water and drowned, for we cannot live without air for any length of time. The nature of our abode depends entirely upon the soil, and we do not always build. The Ondatras who make their homes altogether in burrows, they capture by stopping up all their air holes except one, and seizing them when they come up to breathe. When we live in marshy places we build winter houses, just as the beavers do, though ours are not so strong, and less than three feet high above the surface of the swamp. When the ice freezes over them we make breathing holes in it, and protect these from the frost by a covering of mud. If the frost is so hard that our holes cannot be kept open, we die from suffocation.”

“But you are safe from the hunters in your winter houses?”

Some Little Children

The slender tail of the Lady Ondatra quivered as she drew closer to her babies.

“There were five of us last fall,” she said, “and we lived in a snug little house on the marsh. Our beds were beautiful—so soft and dry—and we had all the food that we should need. We had settled ourselves for a happy winter when a long cruel spear crashed through our roof and wounded three of us. The walls of our house were rudely torn away, and I and my mate only escaped because the hunter lost his balance and stumbled into the mud. Fortunately, our summer tunnels were not yet blocked with snow and so cut off from us, or even then we could not have escaped him.”

The baby Ondatras stirred uneasily in their sleep as if they were dreaming of dangers to come, and their mother patted them gently. With a whisper of thanks Phil said good-bye, and crept through the branching passages up to the earth again.

Early as it was, the squirrels were already chattering to themselves as they scampered amongst

In Nature's School

the trees. A little black fellow, with a bushy tail that spread itself out like a beautiful feathery fan for some six or eight inches at the tip, dropped lightly down in front of Phil. His ebony fur was as fine as thistle-down; Phil was not surprised to hear that his name was "Feathertail."

"When are you coming to pay *us* a visit?" the little creature asked in jealous tones. "I have a fair, green nest in the fork of a top-most branch, and a lovely wife and three young babies, with skins as soft as silk."

"I couldn't climb high enough!" Phil said regretfully. He had been "a regular duffer" at climbing at school, and the bigger boys had often dragged him up a fairly tall tree and left him there, clinging helplessly to the boughs, until they were tired of jeering at him. He shivered now as he thought of it; then squared his shoulders. His grey eyes flashed; he would not say "I can't" again.

"I'll do it somehow!" he cried. The Black Squirrel ran off to give notice of his visit, and

Some Little Children

Phil fixed his whole mind upon climbing that tree.

“Press your knees against it, and use your hands,” whispered a voice in his ear. “That’s right—now swing yourself round and take hold of the branch above you. So! You’re getting on famously. Well done!”

Phil knew that it was Nature who spoke to him, and he felt so proud of her praises that he almost forgot the squirrels. But three small heads, and a larger one, which belonged to a very proud mother, peeped over the nest to welcome him, and Feather-tail waited beside it. Phil laughed to think of his doubts as to whether the branch would bear him; slender as it was it barely stirred beneath his weight.

The baby squirrels were charming little things; he sat in the nest with them, and laughed with glee as the wind rocked it to and fro, while Feather-tail told him how it was only this spring that he had come to these woods.

“Their mother and I used to live in those heights

In Nature's School

you see in the distance there, under that rosy cloud. But the Grey Squirrels came, and drove us out—we couldn't stand the noise they made, and their rough ways frightened us. So Nature told us about this wood, and here we feel quite safe."

"So do I," said Phil, stroking the prettiest baby squirrel gently. "What a jolly little chap this is. I wish I could take him home with me when I go back to England—I s'pose I'll have to go back some day," he finished with a sigh.

The mother squirrel fluffed out her fur in wild alarm, and Feathertail darted forward ready to protect his family.

"How could you suggest such a thing?" he asked indignantly, when Phil had managed to convince him that he meant no harm. "It is bad enough for an ordinary squirrel to be taken away from his forest home and shut in a small cramped prison, but for us it means almost certain death, for we cannot stand captivity. . . . A cousin of mine—'twas the wind that told me—was caught by some travellers

Some Little Children

and put in a tiny cage where she had scarcely room to turn. Of course she died, and they ‘couldn’t think why’! I wonder if they knew how cruel they were?”

His bright little eyes were clouded with grief, and it was not until he had raced to the top of a neighbouring tree and back again that he felt better. Even then he looked uneasy when Phil fondled his babies; as to the mother squirrel, since that unfortunate remark of his, she had been clearly anxious to get rid of him.

“We will go to the stream,” said Feathertail, when he saw that her anxiety was getting too much for her. Phil longed to ask if the baby squirrels might come as well, but wisely refrained. He was sorry to leave that cosy nest on the waving branch; next time he came, he thought, he would be careful what he said.

The stream to which Feathertail led him was bordered by drooping ferns; it was so clear that it might have been a lady’s mirror but for the tiny wavelets rippling from side to side.

In Nature's School

“Don’t you hear it singing as it trickles over the stone?” asked Feathertail. “It is the same song that the wind sings, only more low and sweet. . . . Listen!”

Phil could hear nothing but the rustling of the leaves about them, and the soft flow of the sparkling water; but perhaps his ears were not so keen.

The Black Squirrel sat on the edge of the bank, and dipping his nose well under the surface of the stream, drank deeply and long. Then he placed himself jauntily on his hind feet, and washed his face with his forepaws, splashing them in the stream from time to time as if he thoroughly enjoyed it.

“We are the only Black Squirrels in the world,” he said with melancholy pleasure. “We find our homes in the woods and heights of North America, and even here we are becoming more rare. For the Red and Grey Squirrels drive us from our haunts, and hunters trap us for our fur.”

A cry from the bushes—the indignant protest of a Scarlet Tanager, that had been robbed by his

Some Little Children

mate of a fine fat insect—made Feathertail dart away. Phil waited in vain for his return.

“He has gone for good—that was quite enough to frighten him,” remarked a little clucking voice that reminded Phil of the cry of a fluffy yellow chicken; and the daintiest little squirrel he had yet seen whisked out from the brushwood and sat beside him. It was the Hackee, or Chipping Squirrel, and many a time Phil had seen him running in and out among the bushes; for the Hackee lives on the ground.

Now that he saw him closely, Phil noticed the beauty of the seven stripes that ran across his brownish-grey and orange fur. Five of these were jet-black, and two were white, tinged with flecks of yellow; the fur on his throat and underneath him was the colour of pure snow, and his forehead flamed with brilliant orange. He seemed on the best of terms with himself and all the world, and his small black eyes were full of fun and humour.

In Nature's School

"Did Feathertail offer you any breakfast?" he asked, hopping close to Phil.

"No."

"I thought he wouldn't. He doesn't keep such stores as we do. Come with me."

His movements were so rapid that Phil almost lost sight of him before he gained the stump of the hollow tree which was, so to speak, his hall. Out of this hollow led several tunnels, down one of which the Hackee disappeared. Phil ran after him as quickly as he could, and with all his haste, admired the way in which his host had formed his winding gallery. Up and down it led them, through twists and turns that would have puzzled most squirrels, let alone a boy, until they reached a large snug nest made of dry moss and grasses. It was empty, but still quite warm.

"Those young ones of mine ought to have been up and out more than an hour ago, lazy little creatures!" chuckled the Hackee. "I tell their mother that if they are not more independent

Some Little Children

before the new brood comes, she will have her hands full."

Diving into another gallery, the Hackee came to a full stop. Phil's eyes were scarcely yet used to "seeing in the dark," but he saw at length that they were standing before a heap of nuts, with grain in plenty, and many acorns; the Hackee had more than provided for his wants.

"We stay in these cosy burrows all through the winter snows," he said, "and only come out when the warm sunshine tells us that spring is here. To do this in comfort we work very hard in the fall to fill our storehouses with nuts and grain. This is only one of them—we have others in different places. Help yourself, and take as many nuts as you like," he went on hospitably. "Here—sit in this corner, and I will crack them for you."

But Phil preferred to crack his own nuts; his teeth, though the beavers scorned them, were strong enough for this, he thought. They tasted like beaked hazel nuts, but where were the

In Nature's School

beaks? The Hackee laughed at his bewilderment.

"We carry home nuts in our cheek pouches, four at a time (Why four? Because five would be one too many, of course!), and we are much too sensible, as you might have guessed, to hurt ourselves by those sharp points. We bite them off tidily before we push them into our mouths with our forepaws, as you will see if you watch us one day. It is fine to be a ground squirrel, and much safer than living in trees. Down here we are safe from all our enemies—or almost all," he added in a whisper. Then his expression changed, and his sharp ears pointed forward.

"Hark!" he cried.

"*Chip-munk-chip-munk!*" The call was echoed through the galleries, and the Hackee's merry eyes were full of anger.

"How dare he come here!" he cried, "and calling me in that familiar way too! I'll let him know who is master in this burrow!"

Some Little Children

The second Hackee came joyously down the passage, heedless of offence.

“Hallo,” he cried, looking at Phil, “whom have we got here? That Nature child? To be sure. I——”

But Hackee the First interrupted him.

“You have no business to come down here uninvited,” he said, fiercely. “I would have you know——”

Before he could finish, the other had flown at him. Their slender tails—Phil was not at all astonished when he heard afterwards that these sometimes were snapped across in battle—whirled round like Catherine wheels; two small furry bodies darted backward and forward; gleaming white teeth tried to take savage bites at soft pink noses. It was a wonder that the Hackees found room to turn as they did in that narrow tunnel.

Phil tried in vain to come between them; they pushed him aside as if he were a bundle of grass, and in a second were at each other again.

In Nature's School

He was afraid that, like the otters, they would fight to the death.

But the pugnacious Hackees' rage was spent as suddenly as it had arisen. While Phil imagined they were only gathering their breath for another attack, they had both calmed down.

"I've just been showing him round," said Hackee the First, twisting his tail in Phil's direction.

"Seems a nice boy," said Hackee the Second, feeling Phil's nose anxiously. "I thought I might have bitten it off just now when you got in my way," he said to Phil with much relief, finding it was still there. "Never come between fighting creatures, boy—it's a thankless task."

Phil was quite sure that if he had been his usual size the Hackee would not have chucked him under the chin in that off-hand way, but he did not mind a bit. They were all three sitting before the storehouse, the best of friends, when both chipping squirrels sprang to their feet in terrified accord, standing for a second as if paralysed with

Some Little Children

fear. For their keen sense of smell had told them of the approach of the one enemy they dreaded—the soft-footed, silent Stoat.

Now came the use of those twists and turns of the winding passages. Swift as were the movements of the Stoat, he was on strange ground, while the Hackees knew every inch of it. His savage eyes looked like vengeful green fire to Phil, who waited for him in the centre of the gallery, hoping to bar his way. But the Stoat passed by him as if he were not there, and Phil listened with dread for the strangled cry which would mean that one of the Hackees had met his doom. None came; the Stoat had missed a turn in the winding tunnel, and the flying Hackees reached the hollow tree in safety. Once there, it was easy to dive down another burrow and so baffle pursuit, but they were two very frightened squirrels when at last they stopped for breath.

Chapter the Fifth

A Den in the Rocks



THE sun, like some mighty King in a fairy tale with a great gold crown, and flowing robes of pearl and rose colour, had long since risen above the mountain. A mist of heat hung over the valley, and the giant fir trees at the edge of the wood were like sentinels guarding a wonderland.

Down one of these, from which the bark had been completely stripped, came a singular animal with rough hair, and a short tail thickly set with quills. On seeing Phil, who had just left the home of the Squirrels, he rapped his tail smartly against a tree, almost dropping to the ground with fright. He recovered his balance just in time.



A singular Animal

A Den in the Rocks

"I suppose you are that child of Nature's," he remarked, gruffly. "I am the Urson, the only porcupine you'll find in North America, and I eat bark because I like it. Why do I take it from the top of the tree first? Because I prefer to work my way down. Why haven't I more quills if I am a porcupine? If you use your eyes, you'll see that I am studded all over with them, though my hair is so thick and long that they are not particularly noticeable. How fond you are of questions! Is there anything more you want to know? I'm just going home."

"Couldn't you stay a little while, Mr Urson? You look so—so interesting, and I should like to talk to you!"

The Urson showed his orange teeth in a sudden smile, and rubbed himself against Phil's arm as a friendly cat might have done. In spite of his crop of thick dark hair he was rather prickly, and Phil hoped that he would not want to sit on his lap.

In Nature's School

"You're a bright little fellow," declared the Urson; "I can't think why they called you 'stupid.' Did you put out your quills and fight them?"

"No, -o," Phil acknowledged reluctantly. "I-I-ran away."

"Bad thing to do as a rule, though it hasn't turned out badly for you. When you go back, you must stand up to the boys if they tease you, and show them you have some spirit. Don't get in a temper, you know; but hold your own."

Phil thought it was all very well for a porcupine full of quills to talk so bravely; for a small boy it was quite different.

"Not at all," said the Urson, as if he had spoken his thoughts aloud. "They would leave you alone if you did not let them see you were so frightened. I am nervous myself, but I can keep a dog twice my own size at bay; if he comes too near I turn my back and give him a taste of my tail, and a mouthful of quills into the bargain."

A Den in the Rocks

“Ah, but I haven’t a tail, you see!” said Phil, and the Urson remarked that as that was the case he must learn to do without. Yawning at intervals, he told Phil how his great-great-grandfather (“a most distinguished inhabitant of this forest”) had defended himself single-handed against the attack of an American Indian, coming off victorious in the fight, though leaving half his tail quills in the native’s hands.

“And he used them to decorate his squaw’s front hair!” said the Urson with disgust. The very thought of it made him so angry that he erected all his own quills until he was as completely protected as a knight in armour.

In a moment or two his anger subsided. “Would you like to see my home?” he asked, mindful of the fact that he, in common with all the other creatures of the wood, had been told by Nature to be kind to Phil. He did not seem too pleased when Phil said “Yes,” for he was a most devoted father, and had heard before now of a human being

In Nature's School

taking a liking to a young porcupine, and carrying him off to tame and bring up as his own. He grunted to himself under his breath as he went along, but Phil thought this was just his way.

The Urson's den was some distance off, in the midst of a cluster of rocks that had fallen to the valley from the mountain side. To reach it they had to cross the wood, and the Urson's progress was almost a royal one, for all the small wood things moved away at his approach. He walked deliberately, as if the woods belonged to him, and made no effort to subdue the rustling of his quills through the long grass. A hungry-looking weasel with malicious eyes glared at him furtively, but came no nearer; he had "tried conclusions" with an Urson once, and would not venture again. A sharp-nosed fox licked his longing lips and turned his head aside, while further on a greyish-brown animal huddled up on the lower branch of a spreading tree stretched out a savage paw, and drew it back. Those slender quills were painful things when they pierced the tender places

A Den in the Rocks

between one's claws, and no delicious morsel behind the spears could make up for a swollen mouth that would be sore and smarting for days—so sore that its owner, unable to eat, might die from sheer starvation. So the Porcupine passed under the tree in safety, dawdling on purpose as he caught sight of the crouching figure above him.

“That's ‘Peeshoo’—the Lynx,” he laughed as they moved on. She would make a grab at me if she dared, but she's afraid. You would not think to look at her, would you, that a blow from a stick would kill her at once? Yet so it is. That is because she is a coward at heart, for all her fierceness.”

A snarl of rage from “Peeshoo” told Phil that she had overheard.

“She always snarls when I move out of her reach, though she dare not touch me,” said the Urson, making himself into a bristling ball of defiance as he heard the sound. “I do that to remind her what she would have to face,” he explained to Phil. “There's nothing like letting

In Nature's School

one's enemies see that one is ready for them. 'Don't attack, but always be ready to defend yourself'; this is my motto, and a good one it is."

They were out of the wood soon and in the valley. The entrance that led to the Urson's den was so narrow that he had to make his quills lie very flat in order to creep through, but Phil, as it always happened, was just the right size. He was speedily introduced to Mrs Urson and to "my small son."

The baby porcupine was in reality anything but "small"; Phil found out afterwards that of all wild things he was the largest in proportion to the size of his parents. A big furry bundle of silky brown, his quills not yet having pushed their way through his thick hair, Phil thought him very comfortable to nurse, and Mrs Urson was as pleased with his admiration of her offspring as the Lady Ondatra had been. His father, however, was inclined to be testy.

"He's just an ordinary young porcupine," he

A Den in the Rocks

said; "no more, no less. Don't put nonsense into his head, please—his mother is ready enough to do that."

Feeling rather uncomfortable on her account, Phil turned to Mrs Porcupine, who did not seem in the least disturbed by her lord's reproaches.

"He wants a little change of air, poor dear," she said to Phil in a confidential whisper. "I expect he'll be leaving me soon—I know the signs."

The Urson caught her whisper, and his sharp little face grew sad.

"We've been very good friends," he said, looking round at her wistfully, "and its a nice child; but there's something beyond these woods which is calling—calling. I don't think that I can stay much longer."

His mate moved close to him and touched his nose with hers.

"You'll come back when the summer is over," she said, "and you will find us here."

"Shall I?" returned the Urson, doubtfully, more

In Nature's School

to himself than her. They had forgotten Phil, who was rather in the way. He was glad when the Mother Porcupine came back to the present, and asked him to try some fine spruce bark.

"I wish I could give you buckwheat," she remarked, "for it might be more to your taste. You're not hungry? That's very strange. We always are—when we're awake!" She finished her sentence with a wide yawn, and Phil took this as a hint that she wanted to go to sleep—which was indeed the case. He refused her kind offer of a bed for the day, and the Urson then insisted upon showing him a short cut through the wood. On the way he grew quite talkative.

"That's a bee-tree," he said, as they passed a big maple with a hollow trunk. "The bees may thank me that the bears have not robbed them of their wealth long before now. That crooked branch, just half-way up, is a favourite resting-place of mine, and I allow no trespassing. If a bear appears and begins to climb with the idea of scooping out

A Den in the Rocks

honey from the entrance, some feet higher, I go to meet him; bears have tender noses, and don't care for quills. So they growl a bit and go down more quickly than they came up . . . I wouldn't part with my quills for the strongest teeth in the world."

"Your own teeth seem a very good size," said Phil, taking a look at them.

"They're not so bad," said the Urson, modestly. "But I use them chiefly for stripping bark from the trees. As weapons of defence they would not serve me, for if I tried to bite I should expose my throat and nose, which are the unprotected parts of my body. If ever you see me asleep, you will notice that I hide my head between my forepaws; never expose your weak spot, you know!"

They had come to an open space, and the sun shone down upon them with glowing ardour; the Urson thought of his cool dark den, and hastily wished Phil "good-bye."

"There's 'Peeshoo' again," he said. "Have a

In Nature's School

chat with her if you like, but don't tell her where I live, or about my son. He's too young to show fight yet. Good day to you."

He walked off in that precise, deliberate way of his, but Phil was not to be left alone. The Lynx that he had caught sight of on the branch of the tree some time ago had been awaiting her opportunity, and came running towards him with a series of noiseless bounds. Her back was arched, and her feet outspread; she was not unlike a long-bodied and heavily-built cat, Phil thought, though her peculiar erect ears, tipped by an upright tuft of coarse black bristles, proclaimed her at once as the Lynx of North America, of which the beavers had already told him. Her powerful feet were furnished with large white claws, almost hidden in her thick fur; her face was round, and her eyes as sharp and piercing as those of all her kind. She reached Phil's side as silently as if she were shod with velvet, and greeted him as if she had not seen him before.

A Den in the Rocks

“Come and sit by me, you lonely little fellow,” she purred. “No—you needn’t be frightened. (‘I wasn’t,’ said Phil.) The only creatures that are afraid of me are the hares and foxes, and if I didn’t eat them they would soon overrun the whole place; I do it out of kindness, you know.”

She had seated herself on the ground as she was speaking, and made a soft and comfortable heap of fur. But Phil, though he, too, felt sleepy in the warm sunshine, was loth to do as she suggested and use her back as a cushion.

“I’ve been very unjustly blamed,” she began in a plaintive voice, when she had asked him what colour he thought her eyes, and whether he considered her fur becoming. “Settlers say that I am in the habit of dropping from trees on to the backs of deer, and tearing their throats. They must mistake the Puma for me—isn’t it too bad?”

“Much too bad,” agreed Phil, though he wondered a little if she were as innocent as she would have him believe. It was only politeness that kept

In Nature's School

him beside her, for he wanted to play with the squirrels, who were much more to his liking. He could see one now beckoning to him from a great maple, as if he was very anxious to tell him something that he had heard. With a great effort Phil turned his attention to "Peeshoo"; she was talking of the Wolverine, which he could see that she did not love.

"He was so abominably greedy," she said, "and wanted our share as well as his own. Quite early this morning he was after one of my hares; it was a remarkably active little creature, and soon left him in the lurch. He caught a rabbit or two and a few birds, and might have been satisfied with those. But no—he wanted something larger, and ventured so near the mountains that a Grizzly Bear, who had strolled down to see what these woods were like, found him nosing about his breakfast, which he had just killed. What he said to the Grizzly I don't know, but it couldn't have pleased him, for with a single blow of his heavy

A Den in the Rocks

paw the great bear struck him down. That Wolverine will never try to rob me of my hares again!"

"Was he *quite* killed?" Phil asked her anxiously, and "Peeshoo" smiled an ugly smile that showed her teeth and made Phil draw away from her.

"Don't you know yet what the paw of a big Grizzly is, child? It would kill a man, let alone an animal like the Wolverine. I keep out of the way of the Grizzlies myself—I find it wiser, and so will you."

But Phil knew well that even a Grizzly would not harm him, and he had always been fond of bears. Some day he would go and see them; they were brave creatures, at any rate, and could tell him much that he longed to know.

"Peeshoo" talked on, but he scarcely heard her. So the Wolverine had been killed himself, instead of killing the beavers, and for the present at least they would be safe. How glad Father Beaver would be, he thought; it was good news this time that he had to tell him, and as soon as he could get rid of

In Nature's School

"Peeshoo" he would hasten back to the Colony. He did not mention the beavers to her, for he thought it quite possible that she might eat other small animals besides foxes and hares; and he was learning to be very careful not to injure his friends.

When "Peeshoo's" hunger grew stronger than her interest in her companion, Phil and she parted company. Phil went straight to the river, and followed its course until he came to the Beavers' dome-shaped houses. Of the beavers themselves there was no sign.

"I'll explore one of their tunnels," thought Phil. He dived into the river, using his right leg instead of a tail to splash the water as the beavers did, and soon found a beaver's hole.

"Anyone at home?" he sang out gaily, as he ran through the tunnel's twists and turns.

"We're here!" cried Mother Beaver from its innermost recesses; and there Phil found her with her young ones, looking most forlorn.

"What is the matter?" he asked, for he had

A Den in the Rocks

never seen her so distressed. She was shaking all over as she told him, and her voice was broken with sobs.

The night before, it seemed, almost immediately after Phil had left them, the Wolverine had made an unexpected attack. All had seemed safe, and the beavers had for a moment relaxed their guard. Dropping from the branches of a tree into their very midst, the Wolverine had pounced on a plump young beaver just then engaged in felling a willow sapling; in spite of his struggles there had been no chance for him, and the Wolverine had eaten him then and there. Not content with this, he had taken his stand upon the river bank, intent on further prey. The young beavers were trembling still, and even the bravest of their elders were afraid to venture out from their retreat.

When Mother Beaver heard what had happened to the Wolverine in the early morning, she could scarcely contain herself for joy, and Father Beaver, who had sought his family in vain in the winter

In Nature's School

houses, where many of the colony had taken refuge, would have embraced Phil had he known how. He straightway planned a wonderful new dam that should put the old one to shame; and the number of trees the beavers felled that night was simply marvellous. Nowhere along the river banks were more contented creatures than they; and many a timid wood thing, unknown to them, shared their thanksgiving that the Wolverine was dead.

Father Beaver was interested to learn from Phil of the Hackees' narrow escape.

"We have all our foes," he said, "and must fight them as best we can, with our wits or our teeth, the weapons Nature has given us. That Stoat you saw will perhaps be trapped this winter; his brownish coat will turn pure white when the snow comes, and he will be called an 'ermine' instead of a 'stoat'; and then the hunters will be after him."

"Then the Ermine and the Stoat are the same creature?" cried Phil in amazement.

Den in the Rocks

"The very same," said Father Beaver, "and Ermine fur is more valuable than our own. All sorts of traps will be set for him, for as his coat will be the same colour as the snow, it will be almost impossible for the fur hunters to take him in any other way."

"I wonder *why* his fur turns white in winter?" Phil said, thoughtfully.

Father Beaver looked thoughtful too. "It is said to keep him much warmer than if it were dark," he remarked: "But I should think that it is so that he may not readily be seen against the snow. Perhaps that is Nature's way of taking care of him. We are all her children. But come—these are things that neither you nor I can understand."

Chapter the Sixth

Up in the Mountains



OR woods in a region so far north it was very warm. The beavers dozed through the summer hours, and the humming of the bees grew drowsier every day. The merry little Chipping Squirrels stayed in the shelter of the timber; the Warblers and Wrens and Scarlet Tanagers took refuge under the thickest leaves, while the wood mice and other small wood folk basked in the unusual heat.

Down from the mountains came a tiny breeze. It was so small that the surface of the river was only slightly ruffled; yet it made much difference to Phil. For it brought him a message from the blue distance—that wonderful blue that softened the

Up in the Mountains

outlines of the great peaks until they were like tinted amethysts set deep in the turquoise sky; and when Father Beaver stirred from his sleep in the cool of the evening, Phil was standing beside him, with his green belt firmly girt, as became a traveller.

"I must go to the mountains, dear Beaver," he said, and Father Beaver understood. And then, as Phil was trying to tell him how grateful he was for all that he had learned, and for the kindness that had been shown to him, he felt himself lifted from the side of his furry friend, high up above the tree tops.

"We will go to the mountains," whispered a voice, "the mountains from whence I sprang." And under the stars the night wind carried him safely, murmuring such slumber songs as they went that he was fast asleep long before the journey was over.

It is rather startling to wake in the cave of a Grizzly Bear, and when Phil opened his eyes he

In Nature's School

thought at first that he must be dreaming still. The cave was very dark. At the far end he could see something white that glistened. It looked—yes!—like a pile of bones. He turned his head at once. He did not want to think what that must mean.

A story his mother had told him, when he was quite a little chap, of “the big bear, the middling sized bear and the baby bear” came back to his mind; here were all three, and he himself lying comfortably beside them. It was certainly very odd.

The big bear was very big indeed. As he lay asleep with his head on the back of the middling-sized bear, and one great paw stretched over the baby bear, he looked enormous. His coat, which was very thick and shaggy, and of a wonderful steely hue, made Phil think of a large fur rug; his feet were wide and very long; his toes were armed with deep claws, or talons, as sharp as chisels. His head was so huge that it might have belonged to some giant bear, and in his slightly open mouth

Up in the Mountains

Phil could see yellow teeth that looked powerful enough to make mincemeat of one small boy.

"But he won't hurt *me*," he said to himself, and took a look at the middling-sized bear and the baby bear.

The middling-sized bear wore a coat of some soft dull brown. Her claws, though quite long enough to satisfy most bears, were not so deep as her lord and master's. There was a meekness about her snout which seemed to say that he kept her in good order; but the baby bear's was very jaunty, as if all his short life he had had his own way. He stuck it out inquisitively when he caught sight of Phil, who had been gently tickling his ear in order to wake him, and looked so *very* like his old brown bear as he opened one roguish eye and tried to wink, that Phil put his arm round his neck and hugged him.

"I'm Phil," he said, "and I want you to play with me. I had a bear just like you once. I loved him very much indeed."

In Nature's School

"Of course you did," said the baby bear, cuddling up closer, and giving him an affectionate lick. "What happened when he grew up? Did you shut him into a cage with nasty iron bars and send him away to strangers? My mother says that is what generally happens to young bears when folks get tired of them, or find them troublesome. She says—"

Before the baby bear could finish his sentence the cave was filled with a deafening growl from the big Grizzly, who was glaring at Phil as if he were going to eat him.

"What a fine loud voice you have, Mr Bear," said Phil when the growling suddenly ceased.

"Aren't you afraid?" asked the Grizzly.

"Not a bit!" said Phil. "Nature said no creature should harm me, and of course she knows."

"You have learnt one lesson already—that of not being afraid," said the great bear approvingly: "you can always trust Nature to tell the truth."

He gave Phil's head a kindly pat which nearly

Up in the Mountains

knocked him over, and the young bear, not to be outdone, said that he would be his "big brother," and "show him round." He had only lived as many months as Phil had years, but neither of them thought of that.

"I'll take you to see where the bees keep their honey when my father has gone off hunting," he promised, sprawling over his sleepy mother. "They call him 'the King' up here, and not an animal in these mountains dare defy him."

"I should just think not," said Phil. For the Grizzly, who was standing up now, was indeed a mighty beast. So dauntless was his bearing that Phil could understand how even a strong man, armed, might flee at his approach; it was a matter of course that wolves and foxes and such-like creatures should keep their distance.

After his first trial of Phil's courage, the big Grizzly spoke to him no more. A mighty hunger was gnawing inside him. The young Moose he had brought home two nights before had barely

In Nature's School

sufficed to satisfy the young bear and his mother; there had been little left for him, the giver of the feast, for with kingly generosity he had let them feed first. He could not wait until the evening to go hunting; he must start now.

So he stretched himself with a deep growl; the young bear and his mother growled in response—it was their way of wishing him good luck. As he shuffled out of the cave, his shaggy fur shook round him like a swaying mantle. His gait was awkward, and he rolled slightly from side to side; but for all that there was majesty in every inch of him.

“Now we can play,” said the baby bear, when his mother had strolled off after allowing her lord and master sufficient start. They wrestled with each other until they were both out of breath; the bear threw Phil down easily at first, and his fat little sides shook with laughter as he rolled him over and then sat on his head. After a little practice, however, Phil was his equal, and “Bruno,”

Up in the Mountains

as his mother called him, good naturedly gave him some tips.

“We shall have more room outside,” he said at last, and the boy and the bear trotted off together to a small table-land, where a hollow tree brought Bruno to a sudden stop. The low humming that came from its neighbourhood told Phil what the young bear knew already—that this was a bee-tree, and full of comb. He more than half expected to see a doughty knight in armour guarding its treasures, but no Urson was there.

“I’m going to get some honey,” said Bruno, trying to find an opening sufficiently large to admit his paw. But the bees had known what they were after when they chose that tree; the outside bark was sound enough, and the opening that led to the hollow trunk was high above the ground.

Bruno was not to be defeated. He climbed into the branches with the agility of a squirrel.

“My father couldn’t do this,” he said, grinning down at Phil. “He’s far too heavy—grizzlies can

In Nature's School

only climb when they are young. Dear me! how tiresome some bees are. I shall have to make a hole for myself after all—the comb is too far down for me to reach it unless.”

It did not take him long. He gnawed his way into the wood until he had made a space wide enough for him to thrust in his forepaw; then he scraped out the honey with keen delight, and ate it, comb and all, while the bees buzzed round him in angry protest. Phil refused his share of the luscious sweetness.

“They give some to *me* of their own accord,” he said to Bruno, when he was once more on the ground, “and I should not like to take it from them by force. It would be most dreadfully ungrateful, don’t you think?”

Bruno reflected for a moment; then laughed and shrugged his shoulders. “They would sting me if they could,” he said, “but my coat is too thick. I’ll find some berries for you—there are ripe ones in the scrub.”

Up in the Mountains

The berries were plentiful, and the roots that Bruno found for him were soft and juicy. Bruno curled himself up at his feet while he ate them.

"I haven't lived nearly a whole year yet," said the young bear happily, licking the last trace of honey from his paw. "I was born in a warm little den right under the snow, which mother had built herself. She was telling me all about it before you came."

"Then you tell me," urged Phil, watching him slice a big root in two with his claws as neatly as he himself could have done it with a pocket-knife. Bruno was pleased enough to tell him all he knew, and very proud of his mother's wisdom.

"I suppose you've heard," he began importantly, "that there are bears in almost every part of the world. Besides ourselves in North America there are Musquaws, or black bears—harmless creatures who mind their own business, mother says, and interfere with no one if they are let alone. Then there are brown bears and polar bears, and many

In Nature's School

other kinds. But WE are the really best ones!" He stuck his head on one side, looking more like Phil's toy bear than ever, and lolled out his nice pink tongue. Phil reminded him about the den his mother had made, for he wanted to hear if bears, too, had winter houses.

"She dug it deep in the ground in October, before the frosts came," he said. "Some bears go to sleep for the winter in hollow trees, or build themselves mossy hillocks in which they lie on soft dry leaves and branches of pine trees. But *my* mother prefers a den. When the white snow comes and covers it up no one can find her, and she is safe. All through the winter she stays there, for bears, you know, don't want anything to eat from the late fall until the spring. They live on the fat that Nature has been storing up for them all the summer under their fur, and when they come out of their dens in April they are very hungry and very fierce. Even the hunters keep away from us then; they are afraid! Hark! what was that?"

Up in the Mountains

A distant shot rang out over the mountains.

"They are hunting the Moose," said Bruno, "and that makes father angry, for the Moose belong to *US*. The White Man and the Indians are driving them far away; there were many round these mountains once upon a time; now, only a few. And Moose is so good to eat!

"It's a pity you don't live on roots and bark, as my friends the beavers do. They——"

"Listen!" cried Bruno again. This time it was not the report of a rifle that reached Phil's ears, but the liquid note of a bird.

"That's an Arctic Fox calling for his dinner," said Bruno in a whisper. He stole silently towards the scrub and peered beneath the bushes. His babyish face looked keen enough now, and his small eyes gleamed redly. He came back to Phil with a disappointed grunt, and insisted upon trying to smooth out his curls.

"Couldn't find him," he said, combing Phil's hair with his claws. "He has gone down into his

In Nature's School

burrow. Did you hear him imitating the birds? He does it so cleverly that they are often taken in, and think that he is another bird. When they come close enough to the bush under which he is hiding, he pounces upon them; and there's his dinner."

Phil felt very sorry for the birds. He felt sorry too for the foxes, when he heard how easily the hunter trapped and caught them. Bruno laughed with scorn as he described how they "gave themselves away" by hanging their heads out of their burrows to yelp at their foes, who otherwise might not find them.

"Father says they are just like too-talkative humans, who chatter away when they are watching a trail," said Master Bruno, who was a great talker himself.

When Bruno had wandered off on business of his own, and Phil was quite alone, a hazel-eyed little fox came up to him and allowed him to stroke his beautiful silken fur. It was blue-grey now, and very long and thick; in the winter, he told him, it

Up in the Mountains

would be snow white, and in the spring, perhaps, a mottled brown or stone colour.

“So they call us ‘White’ and ‘Blue’ and ‘Sooty’ and ‘Pied,’” he said in aggrieved tones. “There are more of us in Iceland and Siberia than here, but we love these mountains, and the soil is so loose that our burrows are easily made. We dig these out in the summer, and twenty or thirty of us live together.”

“I should like to go down one with you,” said Phil, who was particularly interested in burrows, and meant to be an engineer when he grew up. Before the Arctic fox could lead the way, a bulky shape came down a well-trodden path on the mountain side, and the fox was off.

A big black bear—Phil knew from his colour and the glossiness of his fur that this must be the Musquaw—sat down on his haunches and stared at him in much the same way that the Grizzly had done. His face was wise, and very gentle. Phil thought he would like to know more of him, and

In Nature's School

was glad when he asked him if he had time to come round to his den.

“If you're tired, I can give you a ride,” he said; and though Phil now never felt tired at all, he jumped up on his broad back and held on tight while the Musquaw trotted up the mountain side, treading in another of the well-worn narrow roads that Phil had noticed.

“These are our paths,” said the Musquaw. “We tread them over and over again, so that in time they become as well-worn as you see. Now here's my den; and here's my little fam-il-ee!”

Phil thought the Musquaw's den much more cheerful than the Grizzlies', for here were no glistening bones. The Musquaw, as Phil knew, was a “berry-eating bear,” seldom or never touching flesh, with the exception of that of the tiny snails so plentiful in the mountains after rain, and even fonder of honey than the Grizzlies. His “fam-il-ee” consisted of an amiable young spouse and four cinnamon-coloured young ones. Though born in the

Up in the Mountains

same month as Bruno they were not nearly so large. Their father touched them very gently as he showed them one by one, for his great strength made him very tender with weakness.

“When first they came they were only six inches long, the scamps,” remarked their mother, rubbing them over fondly. “They were covered with grey hair then, but now, as you see, they are more brown than grey. When they are a year old they will change their coats for glossy black ones, like their father’s and mine.”

They were bright, affectionate little creatures, and so disappointed when they found that Phil did not care for snails that he tried to eat one to please them. They gave him a corner of their den “for his very own,” as they said, and begged him to promise that he would come again.

“Of course I will,” said Phil. “I love the mountains, and mean to stay here for quite a long time.”

But two things happened that same evening

In Nature's School

which made him wish to leave as much as he had longed to come.

The first happened as he waited for Bruno at the place where they had agreed to meet—by the beech-tree on the lower plateau. The Musquaw, intent upon his berry-gathering, was lingering by a great bush that skirted one of the little paths he had called his own. Unseen by him, and from the direction where the wind could not carry him the warning scent, two fierce-looking men with rifles tracked him warily through the scrub; his head, with its wise, kind eyes, was visible for a moment above the bush; the men raised their rifles and fired, and the Musquaw, his glossy coat all trailed in the dust, gave a convulsive shudder and lay quite still.

As Phil remembered the “little fam-il-ee” waiting in the cave, the hot tears rushed blindingly to his eyes. He thought, too, of his merry play-fellow of the morning, and a growing fear that he also might have been shot made him hasten back to the Grizzlies.



“He was very angry”

Up in the Mountains

He took the wrong turning and lost the way; he was on the other side of the mountain, he knew, for it looked down on a wide, desolate lake of purple-grey, instead of on green woods and a winding river. To his great joy he saw the "King of the Mountains" not far off, and would have hailed him. But instinct, to which Father Beaver had told him he must always listen, warned him to wait a moment, and he moved quietly into the shadow of a rock.

What could the Grizzly be doing? He was burying something in a deep pit under a mass of loose earth and leaves; something he meant to come back for later on, Phil guessed, as he could not carry both that and the young doe—poor, pretty thing, with that ugly tear in her pearl-grey throat!—which was lying beside him. He was very angry, that was clear; for his deep growls were like the low threatenings of thunder, and the primrose evening light shone on his bared teeth as his lips were drawn back savagely.

In Nature's School

When he had finished the burying to his satisfaction he shuffled off, and Phil, longing to call him, yet still warned to silence by instinct, waited patiently for what would happen next. Presently the loose stones at the top of the pit stirred; a brown hand was pushed through cautiously, and was followed by the rest of an Indian's body. One arm hung limp and useless beside him, and the marks of the bear's cruel talons ran across his face. The Grizzly had struck him down, and, taking his faintness for death, had buried him under the sandy earth.

Half dazed still, the Indian crept down the path, and Phil called to the night wind. "Take me away," he cried to her entreatingly. "I can't go back to the Grizzlies—not even for Bruno's sake. For some day he will grow up too, and then, perhaps, *he* 'll want to bury Indians alive and eat them!"

The night wind comforted him, even as Nature had done, and gathered him very close, as if she were glad to have him in her arms again.

Chapter the Seventh

On Greenland's Shores



OUNTAINS again, but this time white and glistening, with the steel-blue crests of glaciers raised sharp against the snow. It was Greenland's brief summer, and

the sun and the warm east winds had melted some of the ice that bound her coast ; a fringe of green hung over the land that had been but lately a frozen waste, and in the shelter of the tall reeds some poppies showed their flaming heads.

Phil stood on a shore by a rock of crystal that glittered with all the colours of the rainbow where it caught the light. The air was fresh and keen ; his little bare feet would have been cold but for the way in which his blood danced through them.

In Nature's School

Not a creature was in sight, and he felt lonely.

“*Whoo-hoo-hoo-who!*” he called ; it was the cry of the Hushwing he had heard in the Northern woods, and came more naturally to his lips than any other.

“*Whoo-hoo-hoo-who-oo!*” echoed from a rocky crag, and a Snowy Owl sailed down to meet him on majestic wings. Her golden eyes gazed steadily into his, and filled him with shyness. He wished she would speak, for he did not know what to say.

“Have you lived here always?” he asked her presently, standing on one leg, as he had often been scolded for doing at school. Her wings were motionless in the sunlight, and when she spoke her voice “boomed” as the Hushwing’s had done, only much more deeply.

“I have lived here always,” she said ; “through the dreary night of winter and the flying summer days. Long before that valiant Norseman, Erik the Red, came to these shores and named them ‘Greenland,’ some thousands of years ago, the Snowy

On Greenland's Shores

Owls flew over the island and called it theirs. It was all their own then, save for the birds and bears and seals, and a few strange men. But come with me, and I will show you wonderful things."

Fixing her great claws on a low ledge of the crystal rock, she lowered her wings and told Phil to sit between them. Pleased and wondering, he obeyed, and with steady, noiseless flight she carried him inland, until they were passing over the countless leagues of the frozen sea.

"This is Greenland's 'ice cap,'" she said. "It never melts."

She hovered so close to the ice that Phil could see numbers of tiny holes in its smooth surface. At the bottom of each was a tiny drop of water, shining between floating particles of soft grey dust.

"That is 'ice powder,'" said the Snowy Owl, in her most superior manner, "and is formed of the atoms of dust which hang suspended in the atmosphere, and fall to earth with the falling snow. It is the home of myriads of tiny plants. Some of

In Nature's School

these are 'diatoms'—minute cells of soft vegetable matter cased in a mineral film, one half of which fits over the other like the lid of a pill box. Others are a species of seaweed, so small that you could not see them unless great numbers were together. Diatoms, though belonging to the vegetable kingdom, have extraordinary powers of movement; some are shaped like crescents, or forests of miniature trees, or beaded necklaces.

"You will find these minute plants in the little pools where the sun has melted the ice, with millions of little animals who feed upon them."

"Little animals?" cried Phil. "Do let me look!" But all that he could see were some very small specks floating on the top of water that was yellowish brown.

"It is the tiny plants which make it that colour," said the Owl, looking wiser than ever, "and those wee specks are little animals which, although formed of a single cell, have mouths and gullets and other organs."

On Greenland's Shores

"It's very wonderful," sighed Phil. "I wish that I could see them for myself."

"Some day you may," she told him; and then once more soared upward through the clear white sunbeams towards the sky.

Higher, and higher still they went; they were over the mountains now. As the Snowy Owl winged her flight above the glaciers, the unearthly beauty of the scene caused Phil's heart to thrill with a strange emotion. It was as though he had crossed the dread river, and had entered into the heavenly city. Far and wide the lovely vision spread open to his timid gaze, like a fairy palace of crystal and pearl and rose, and he feared to speak lest the sound of his voice should dispel the wondrous sight.

Slowly the Owl descended to earth again.

"What do you see on the snow?" she asked him suddenly.

"Thousands of sparkling diamonds," said Phil, and the Snowy Owl bade him look once more. He noticed then that here and there were curious

In Nature's School

patches of red and yellow on the pure white.

“Those are tiny animals, too,” she said—“multitudes of jelly spheres, each smaller than a pin’s head.

“There is a red ‘Snow Plant,’ also, which I will show you presently, and on the crystals of newly fallen snow you may often see curious little insects which move by thrusting out two long, stiff bristles, which grow where their tails should be. They usually carry these neatly folded underneath them, but when they want to jump they jerk them straight out, and fly into the air like quaint toy frogs on a very large scale.”

Many other wonders did the Snowy Owl show Phil in the island she loved so well. He listened with awe to her stories of all that happened during the months of darkness when the sun was never seen; but he laughed when she showed him the frowning crags which the Esquimaux believe to be the hiding-place of their fathers’ spirits, who come down from the moon to revisit Greenland.

On Greenland's Shores

The Owl looked very solemn. "Who knows?" she said, and spoke no more until they had reached the fringe of green again. The sea-gulls called from the shore, and the Gyr-Falcon, fair of plumage as the Owl herself, wheeled high above them. The cheery twitter of the Little Auks came with the soft murmur of the sea, and the beautiful Arctic Gull, her coral breast glowing against the snow, preened her feathers carefully.

The Snowy Owl flew to a shelving bank covered deep with moss and lichen.

"And now you shall see the most beautiful thing on the island," she said; and showed him a roughly built nest half hidden on a crumbling ledge. Downy white owlets, little and big, filled it to overflowing; they greeted their mother with clamorous cries of hunger, and opened such yawning mouths that they seemed to be all beaks and feathers.

"Have patience, my owlets," she cried fondly; and, pacifying them with a few deep notes of love, left Phil beside them while she went to fetch them

In Nature's School

food. He had scarcely perched himself upon the edge of the nest to make their closer acquaintance when a tiny little mouse-like animal, with a wee tail barely half an inch long, crept out of the moss.

“Did you ever see such a family?” he said, disdainfully, as the owlets gaped. “The Snowy Owl lays her eggs all through the spring, and in the same nest, whenever the fancy takes her. If you had come earlier in the year you would have seen the first brood of owlets helping her to hatch the second. They go to sleep on the smooth white eggs, and save her any amount of trouble.”

The mouse-like little animal kept one eye on the sky, noting the Owl's movements, while he talked to Phil, and his look was anything but kindly.

“There is nothing she would like better than to swoop down upon *me*,” he said, with a squeaking bark of anger. “She flies by day instead of by night, which is rather a nuisance so far as I am concerned. Yes—I live on the island, too, and find

On Greenland's Shores

plenty of grass and reeds to feed on when the snows have melted. In the winter there is only moss for me, and I have to dig deep even for that. I make air shafts up to the surface of the snow, as Nature taught me, so that I can breathe comfortably when I am at work. The Snowy Owl and the Gyrfalcon are always on the look out, but, as you see, they haven't caught me yet. I should fight them if I were only a little larger!"

In spite of his small size he looked both fierce and determined as he sat on the grey-green moss and stared scornfully at the nest.

"Such eyes and beaks!" he said. "You should see *my* little ones—they're the sweetest things in the world." His hard voice softened, and when next he spoke it was quite amiably.

"I am one of the Lemmings," he said when Phil ventured to ask his name. "Haven't you heard of us? In the North of Europe we are greatly dreaded, for we sweep over tracts of country in our thousands, coming from no one knows where, and swarming

In Nature's School

over everything we find in our path. We eat our way through fields of corn, and even haystacks; we swim through lakes and rivers, and nothing—not even fire itself—can make us swerve aside once we have made up our minds to go on. When we have passed, there is no green thing left; we are ‘worse than locusts,’ the people say, and they are glad when we reach the sea, and are swallowed up. It is the only thing that can conquer us.”

The baby owlets raised their hunger cry as they saw the big white owl coming towards them from afar off with something in her beak, and the Lemming gave another sharp squeak of anger and disappeared beneath the moss. While her young ones divided the spoil, Phil tried to question their mother about the Lemmings, but she had no attention to spare for him just then. Those little owlets of hers must not go hungry, and their appetites were large. Some other creature than she must do the honours of the island now.

“You’ll find some Harp Seals in Silver Bay, be-

On Greenland's Shores

hind the glaciers," she said. The downiest owlet whispered to Phil that he would like to see those Harp Seals too, and Phil, delighted to have company, tucked him under his arm. The Snowy Owl, who had just soared off on another flight, swooped down as if shot from the sky, and, seizing the owlet in her strong beak, dropped him back into the nest without a word. Slightly abashed, Phil hurried away. That baby owl was so soft and warm, and his eyes as golden as the sun; Phil wished his mother had not come back so soon.

But he thought no more of the owlet when he reached the bay. Ice islands floated on its tossing waters, and on these, as on the shelving beach, lay curious creatures fast asleep. Some were cream colour or pearly white; others—much larger than these—had irregular patches or stripes of black on their pale skins, or small black spots. The largest of all were of a soft dove grey, with huge black figures on their backs shaped like an ancient harp. As Phil drew nearer, a seal posted as sentinel on the broadest

In Nature's School

island gave a peculiar cry. The sleeping seals were in an instant awake; there was a hurried consultation, and then the largest amongst them dived off the ice and rushed violently to the shore, driving himself through the water by means of his hind feet, which both turned inwards. As he scrambled up the bank in eager haste—fully nine feet of dripping seal—his soft brown eyes were as full of intelligence as those of a human being.

“We heard that you were coming, O little one!” he cried, “and in the name of all the seals we welcome you. I am an Attersoak, or fifth-year seal, and the ruler of our herd; my people call me the ‘Great Chief,’ and many are the dangers through which I have led them safely.”

The seals on the beach, seeing that Phil had been received in so friendly a manner by their ruler, ventured to approach him, shuffling rapidly over the glistening stones. Amongst them were many young ones, and these were all of the same soft creamy white. Phil noticed that they kept a respectful

On Greenland's Shores

distance from the Attersoak, whose great feet would have crushed them easily.

“This beach is our ‘rookery,’ or ‘nursery,’ ” said the old seal graciously. “On our floating ice islands, or in the swirl of the sea, seal mothers could not tend and feed their young. So they seek some quiet bay where they are not likely to be disturbed, and there our little ones are born. As soon as they are strong enough to face the waters, we shall teach them how to dive and swim, even as we do ourselves, and then we shall be off on a long journey southward. We make two of these journeys every year, travelling under the stars when Greenland is far behind us, when the moon turns the sky to silver. During the day we eat and sleep, and grow fat, after our long fasts on land, which sometimes we do not break for two or three months at a time. Our battles are over then, and we have nothing to do but to enjoy ourselves.

“The colour of our coats,” he went on, seeing that Phil was interested, “changes every year until

In Nature's School

we reach full growth. During our first year it is cream colour; the second, pearl grey; when we are three years old the grey is striped, and in our fourth year we are decorated with spots. When we reach our fifth year we are as you see me now!" And he threw back his head with a lordly gesture, and dismissed his attendant wives.

"You and I will bask in the sun," he said to Phil, "and I will tell you anything you wish to know."

The sun was warm, and Phil stretched his limbs on the smooth stones some little distance from the wet seal. But almost as he looked at him his fur became quite dry—the water had all run off, as it did from his own brown coat.

"In our case that is because the skin beneath our fur is always giving out a liquid oil which makes it waterproof. Some seals have two coats of fur, as perhaps you know, one tightly packed beneath the other. Nature has provided these, just as she does the thick layer of fat immediately beneath the surface of our skin, as a protection against the

On Greenland's Shores

bitter cold of the ice fields. This underskin"—his voice dropped, and he looked warily round to see that none of the young Attaraks, as the Greenlanders call the yearling seals, were near him—"is the 'seal-skin' men value so highly that year by year we, who would harm no one, are killed by thousands . . ."

"Those queer little people called the Esquimaux live in these regions, don't they?" asked Phil hurriedly, very anxious to talk about something else. The seal's eyes shone as if there were tears in them, and Phil was grieved to think that he, too, might some day be hunted and killed. The mention of the Esquimaux was unfortunate, as he was to learn; for seals provide him with almost every necessity of his daily life.

"Yes—the Esquimaux live in these regions," said the Attersoak moodily, "as we know to our cost. When he shuts himself up for the winter in the snug little house he has hewn out of the ice, it is oil that he gets from our fat which gives him light and heat. Our flesh is his greatest dainty, and he

In Nature's School

clothes himself in the skins he has stolen from us. He hangs them too, on the walls of his house, and uses them to cover his Kajak—the little boat in which he hunts us—so that it may be watertight, and in the summer they form his tent. ‘To kill a seal’ is the ambition of every Esquimaux boy in Greenland from the moment he first draws breath, and some day—some day, perhaps, no more seals will be left to kill.”

“How do you know these things?” Phil had not meant to ask this question, but it slipped from his lips before he thought.

The Attersoak looked past him to the blue waters of the bay with a deep sigh.

“There are birds in the air,” he said, “whose sight is keen. They call to each other over their hunting ground, which is the sea, and we have ears to hear. But for their warnings our sentinels would often be at fault, for we are a trustful herd; their shrill cry tells us when danger is at hand, and we are their grateful friends.”

On Greenland's Shores

A very fat little seal that could only have been a few months old flopped up to the Attersoak's shoulder. He was chased by his mother, whose spotted coat showed that she was not yet full grown; he seemed in a great hurry to speak before she came.

"*Please, please* need I go into the water yet?" he bleated. "It looks so cold, and I don't know how to swim!"

"This moment!" roared the Attersoak, and the baby seal scuttled away, looking very frightened.

"Instant obedience is the first thing he has to learn," remarked the old seal, watching the patient mother coaxing him to plunge down the steep bank after her. Other seals quickly followed her example, and before long all the young ones, many of whom had already been practising in rocky pools, were plunging and splashing in and out of the curling waves, trying to outdo each other by diving deep. Every few moments they came up to breathe through their widely opened nostrils, and the Attersoak ex-

In Nature's School

plained to Phil how these are closed when the seals were under water.

"The males of our herd will start to-night on our journey southward," he added, with a thrill of joy in his deep voice. "The others will follow a few days later. Will you come with us, little one, or do you wish to stay?"

"If you don't mind, I'll stay," said Phil. "I want to see the Polar Bear."

The Harp Seal looked at him in horrified surprise.

"You want—to see—the Polar Bear!" he cried. "Well, it may be all right for *you*, but he's our deadly enemy."

He was so distressed that he unthinkingly gave the signal "*Dive*" by a sudden movement of his head. The same instant the watching sentinel on each floating island repeated it, and with one accord every single seal vanished as completely as if the sea had swallowed him. Their chief gave a low cry, which meant "*A false alarm*," and upon the ice is-

On Greenland's Shores

lands they jumped again, as quickly as well-trained soldiers at their drill.

"One of the Esquimaux favourite ways of catching us," said the big seal, turning himself over clumsily so that the sun could reach his other side, "is to harpoon us when we are sleeping. Our sentinels, chosen by me for the quickness of their wits and the keenness of their sight, give the signal you saw just now, and before the Esquimaux can strike the ice is empty. Our herd was attacked last summer by some men with hair as yellow as yours, who came in a ship with sails like a great white bird, and shot fire at us from long reeds . . . That is why our herd is smaller now than it has ever been before."

The Attersoak shook himself as if he were weary. He had stayed longer on shore than was his custom, and his limbs were aching for a deep swim.

"Is there anything more I can tell you?" he asked, with a longing look at the sea. Phil shook

In Nature's School

his head, and the seal tumbled into the water with the joy of an animal returning to his native element.

“We shall start on our journey to-night,” he repeated joyfully, and the big seals on the floating islands took up the cry.

His back was scarcely turned when a mother seal signalled to Phil to come and talk to her.

“It makes our husbands so angry if we move about much on our own account,” she whispered, as Phil sat down in the shadow of the rock upon which she lay, “or I would have come to you. They think we want to leave them altogether and go off to the fishing grounds. But we should not dream of going for more than a day or two until our babies are strong enough to face the breakers and can do without us. Look at mine—isn’t he the sweetest little creature? Come here, my ‘Snowbird,’ and let us see how quickly you can climb a rock!”

“Snowbird”—so named, Phil learnt, because his coat was almost pure white instead of a deep rich cream—had been wrestling with other small seals

On Greenland's Shores

eager to show their strength, and was quite out of breath as he obeyed his mother's summons. He was a queer little fellow, with big wondering eyes and awkward flippers. His head was very large and inclined to wobble; he was one of the youngest of the baby seals, and by no means independent of his mother yet. He was as hungry as the owlets, Phil decided, as he nestled close to her and began to feed. The way she watched him gave Phil a lump in his throat. Someone had looked at him like that—once, long ago.

"What would he do without you?" he asked her soberly.

"He would die!" she answered, such a wealth of love in her soft eyes that they seemed to Phil like ambient lights. "Sometimes seal hunters kill us during the summer time, and then our young ones wait for us in vain, and starve."

"Shall you take him with you to sea?" said Phil.

The mother seal moved still closer to the warm little body pressed against her own.

In Nature's School

“What do you say, my ‘Snowbird’?” she asked him fondly. “Are you going to be a fisherman, and to ride on the white sea horses when a storm blows up from the west? I shall be glad to leave this beach,” she went on to Phil, “for although it is quiet and peaceful enough now, there were terrible times at first. The lords of the herd, who were waiting here before we came, as perhaps the Great Chief told you, fought fiercely for our possession, and when our babies were born it was always touch and go whether they might not get hurt. If we so much as moved a flipper without permission, our lords were angry, and they bit so savagely that we were afraid to stir. When the summer is over it is quite different; we are independent then.”

As Phil looked over the beach to the floating ice islands he became aware that a big seal on one of the nearest was regarding him very sternly. Fearful of getting “Snowbird’s” mother into trouble, he strolled away, and made friends with some Ivory Gulls.

On Greenland's Shores

They told him of shipwrecks and terrible storms; of curious creatures who lived in the depths of the sea, and were only to be seen when the water was very still. Phil climbed the rocks and peeped at the ledges where the seabirds built their nests, and when they had gone to roost and would play with him no longer, he had another talk with the Lemming, who grudgingly showed him his summer home. He was not at all amiable; "perhaps," thought Phil, "he's been teased by a bigger boy."

When the clouds were softest lilac, and twilight had dimmed the whiteness of the snow, Phil returned to Silver Bay, to see the last of the Harp Seals. Headed by their Great Chief, the full grown males made for the south, swimming steadily in a straight line, with bodies curving widely through the water, as their swift strokes bore them on. Phil watched them until they were out of sight; then he found his way back to the nest of the Snowy Owl, and snuggled himself in among her owlets.

Chapter the Eighth

“Lord of the Snows”



HE Snowy Owl was up betimes next morning; the sky was still alight with amber and rose and crimson when the young owls called for their breakfast. Phil clambered out of the nest and thought he would like some too; he remembered seeing a cluster of berries on a trailing bush, and he knew that they were good to eat because he saw that the birds had taken some already.

As he munched them he thought of the Polar Bear and wondered where he would be likely to find him. The Snowy Owl, who had grown quite fond of him already because his face was almost as round as her own owlets', and his eyes so soft and

Lord of the Snows

grey, gave him a gentle tap with her beak as he swallowed the last mouthful, and asked if she could help him.

“The largest bear I have ever seen—‘Lord of the Snows’ they call him—lives further up the coast,” she said in reply to his question. “He is in a sorry plight just now, for all his lordship, for his mate and his little cub were killed by the Greenlanders some nights ago, before his very eyes. I will take you part of the way to him if you are sure you want to go.”

Phil nodded—he was quite sure; and when the little owlets ceased to demand “more” each time their mother fed them, she lowered her stately wings, and Phil nestled between them again.

Away to the North she sped. The world was a’glitter with ice and snow, and the fringe of green left far behind. They sank down slowly over a rock-strewn path hedged in with glaciers.

“*Whoo—oo—whoo—oo—hoo—oo!*” she boomed.

“I must leave you now, for I dare not stay away

In Nature's School

from my babies longer. But if you want me you have only to give my call."

He was glad she had said that, for the glaciers looked forbidding now that the sun was hidden by sullen clouds. A low deep roaring reached his ears; it came from the other side of the rocks, and was sadder, he thought, than the moaning of the sea. He supposed that it was the voice of the disconsolate Polar Bear.

"He must be dreadf'ly misrubble to make a noise like that," he thought, his heart full of pity; and he hastened on to try to comfort the lonely creature.

The sight that met his eyes as he turned the corner was one that he never forgot. A vast herd of animals, something the shape of seals, but nearly twice as large, tumbled over each other at the edge of the shore, a tossing mass of huge black bodies and gleaming tusks. The sea seemed full of them, and each, as he landed, flapped heavily down just where he was, while the next behind him snorted

Lord of the Snows

and propped his back to make him stir. And all the while the same deep roaring that Phil had heard went on unceasingly; it was almost enough to deafen him.

"Why don't they move on?" he demanded of the creature nearest to him, whose small but brilliant eyes regarded him with a puzzled stare.

"Why should they move on?" she answered. "They are quite comfortable where they are."

When the roaring ceased, as it did presently, Phil tried to show them that if they came a little further inland there would be room for all.

"I s'pose you're Walruses," he added. "I've seen your picture. My book at home said you were very brave, but I don't think Father Beaver would say that you used your wits."

A fine old Walrus who had pushed his way through the rest to Phil gave a loud bellow of approval.

"That's what I tell them," he cried, "but they don't heed me. It's laziness—pure laziness. They

In Nature's School

would rather lie where they are and be trodden on, than move on a bit and have plenty of room to spare."

The roaring began again, as if to drown his voice, but the old Walrus held his ground.

"It's true," he said. "It took me years to persuade them that two-legged beings were dangerous. They would just stand still and stare at their bright spears or fire sticks until they were wounded to death, and helpless, the foolish children!"

It amused Phil to hear the great black creatures called "children"—they looked to him more like very fat old men, and their prominent muzzles gave them an air of fierceness that was quite absent in the seals.

"Yes, we can fight when we are put to it," said the old Walrus proudly, as Phil remarked this, "and now that I have made my people heed what I tell them, if we are surprised on land, and our retreat cut off, we throw ourselves against the invaders and overpower them, so that we may

Lord of the Snows

scramble back into the sea. If they attack our young, so much the worse for them. For when we are fully roused, no bear will fight more desperately than we."

Now that Phil had grown used to the sight of so many Walruses together, he could see that the smaller ones kept very closely to their mothers' sides. The old Walrus pointed out how short their tusks were in comparison with his own, which were quite two feet in length.

"Like the mother seals," he said, "our females land so that they may have their young on shore. These are born in the winter, and at first are only the size of year-old pigs. They are a great care to their mothers, who swim about with them between their forefeet until they are old enough to take care of themselves. If a mother walrus scents danger when she is on the ice field, she makes her baby jump on her back, and carries it off to the open sea, or to one of our ice-holes. What are 'ice-holes'? Why, holes in the ice, of course. We,

In Nature's School

and the seals as well, make many of these on the ice fields, so that if we are pursued by an enemy we can jump through them and escape under water. We live on sea-weed—there is a certain kind of which we are particularly fond—and fish, and—yes—young seals! They are very tender at certain times of the year.”

Phil hoped he would not take it into his head to explore the coast line further until all the Harp Seals were safely off to sea. He had learnt from the seagulls that many other kinds of seal lived on these shores, but he was only anxious about the ones he knew.

“I’m glad those dear beavers of mine never kill things,” he said to himself. “They were more clever than any creatures I have met yet, and not even Bruno was half so nice.”

The thought of Bruno reminded him of the Polar Bear. The old Walrus did not seem to care for the mention of his name any more than the seals had done.

Lord of the Snows

“Look at this scar,” he said, turning his neck so that Phil could see the marks of a jagged wound but lately healed. “I was dozing on the ice field not far from one of those holes I told you of, when suddenly I caught a pungent scent—the scent of a bear, and between me and the ice-hole was a big “Nennook,” as Polar Bears are called up here. He had reached me by swimming under the ice, coming up to breathe at each ice-hole, and approaching so silently that not even the seagulls had noticed him. With one great bound he fixed his claws into my neck; I snapped at his muzzle and dug my tusks through his hoary fur. They must have piercèd some tender part, for he fell back from me with a cry of rage. Some of our herd rushed forward then to help me, and the Nennook thought better of killing me for his supper, and dashed back through the ice-hole. I shall bear his marks to my dying day.”

“Was that the bear that the Owl called ‘Lord of the Snows’?”

In Nature's School

“No, indeed,” said the Walrus, and a shudder passed through his great sides. “Had it been he, I should not have escaped. Even the Greenlanders, with the cunning weapons they have made with their own hands, and the fire sticks, more deadly still, which travellers bring from a distant land, shun the ‘Lord of the Snows,’ and dread his vengeance.”

“Yet the Snowy Owl told me that they had captured his cub and killed his mate. Were they not afraid?”

“They were many in number, and he was away, or they would not have ventured near. His mate, though not so large, was as fierce as he, and wounded several of them before they could take her cub. As she fell backward, shot through the heart, they saw the ‘Lord of the Snows’ coming towards them over the ice field, and fled for their lives. They had no chance of taking either skins or bear flesh, so it did not do them much good.”

“And the ‘Lord of the Snows’?”

Lord of the Snows

The old Walrus polished his splendid tusks on a strand of seaweed before he answered. Then: "He watches alone," he said.

For some hours longer Phil lingered beside the Walrus herd, wondering anew at their strange shapes and stranger antics; he did not in the least wish to play with them. They were, however, very gentle towards their young—all animals were that, he thought; but the old males were scarred, as if from many battles.

"We fight for our mates," the Walrus said; "and sometimes I think it is more than they're worth."

Six or seven indignant lady walruses, wives of his own, flew to his side at this. In the midst of their uproar a beautiful sea-bird with gleaming wings flew over Phil's head in narrowing circles until she alighted at his feet.

"Is it the 'Lord of the Snows' you seek?" she asked him; and in spite of the roaring and snorting of the herd her notes came sweet and clear. "You

In Nature's School

will find him far up the coast line, where the glacier crests are sharpest, and the snow is frozen still."

Phil did not try to say "good-bye" to the Walruses, for they would not have heard him. He slipped away quietly, and followed a pathway the sea-bird showed him over the polished ice. To his great amazement he noticed that under his feet was a soft thick covering of hair; that was the reason, then, why he had not felt the sharp rocks on the shore. He was still marvelling at this discovery when he came upon the Polar Bear.

Lying outstretched upon a crag of rock, his silvery fur tossed by the wind, and his slender head turned towards the sea, was the "Lord of the Snows." His red-rimmed eyes shot sombre fire, but as Phil came nearer he made no sign. It was Nature's child, he knew, and he had promised to welcome him; but surely not now, when his heart was torn, and his rage still burning. It was too much to ask. So he waited in moody silence, while twilight fell on

Lord of the Snows

the glaciers, and the wind blew chill. Phil shivered a little; the great bear looked at him with a start.

“Are you cold?” he growled.

“Yes—cold, and lonely, too,” said Phil, making the one appeal that the Nennook could understand just then.

With a queer little sound of pity he drew Phil down to him.

“Lie here between my forepaws,” he said in a gentle voice, “and I will keep you warm.”

All the night through Phil slept with him. When he awoke he was as warm as toast, for he had grown a coat of bear skin!

It was lovely fur—soft and thick as the velvet moss in the woods at home. The “Lord of the Snows” smiled at Phil’s delight, and hugged him close to his shaggy side.

“Nature has given you that,” he said, “so that you may journey in comfort over the ice with me. Come, my little one; we will go to the shore. The past is past, and the sunlight calls us.” He shook

In Nature's School

his great body, and with one last look in the direction of the rocky den where all through the winter his mate had slept, shut in by the snow, and had nursed his cub, he turned his face to the sea, and started off at a quick gallop.

Phil kept pace with him easily. When they reached the sea he plunged in after him, and swam with the same long strokes. The ice-cold waves dashed over his head and did not hurt him; the ocean teemed with life, and opal-hued fish darted away before them in every direction. Oh, it was splendid—splendid, to swim like this; he should never tire.

“Is it well with you, little one?” the “Lord of the Snows” would ask, ceasing his quick strokes for a moment that he might see the boy’s glad face.

“It is well, O Nennook,” Phil would reply, and the bear would dive deep, breasting the top of the waves again with a shimmering fish in his strong jaw.

Lord of the Snows

At night they rested on floating icebergs, and Phil tucked his fur-capped head under the great bear's chin, and watched the stars twinkling as he had done in the land of the beavers.

"They will have felled all the wood they can use by this time," he said one night with a sigh. And the Nennook, who had heard of them from the night wind (she it is who tells all their secrets), was smitten with fear lest Phil should want to return to the fair green woods where time had passed for him so happily. Phil's eyes grew very wistful in the darkness as the bear besought him not to leave him. He was trying to put into words some of the things that Nature had told him, and he could not find the right ones.

"I don't think I shall ever go back to my beavers, Nennook," he said at last. "There is much, Father Beaver told me, that Nature wants me to see. In a little while, perhaps, the night wind will take me to some warm land, very far away. I saw it last night in my dreams. It was very beautiful."

In Nature's School

But it was not yet that the night wind called him, and for many days and nights to come he stayed with the "Lord of the Snows." The great block of ice that they had chosen to rest on was floating southward quickly, and since they were now a long way off from Greenland's shores, the Nennook decided not to return to his lonely cave.

"This iceberg will bear us to other countries," he said, "where perhaps Reindeer will be plentiful. I long to chase them over the snow; the taste of their flesh is very good."

Meanwhile he fed entirely on fish, and very clever he was at catching it. Every kind came alike to him, and he, like the mother Porcupine and the Musquaws, was puzzled to find that Phil was never hungry.

"It's not a bit more wonderful than that I should have grown a coat of fur," laughed Phil, who was glad that he had not to eat raw fish.

One day, when he was curled up close to the bear on the floating iceberg, Phil saw what he imagined



"It's a Greenland Whale"

Lord of the Snows

to be an island about seventy feet long, and half as wide across, coming up to the surface of the sea from the depths below. It was velvety black in colour, with a tinge of grey towards one end. As Phil stared at it in surprise, a tall column of water rose suddenly to a great height, accompanied by a snorting sound that was most peculiar.

"What a wonderful island!" he said; and for the first time since Phil had known him the Nennook burst into a merry roar.

"It's a Greenland Whale," he cried, giving Phil an affectionate hug that he might not be hurt at his laughter. "To me she's the most wonderful creature in the north seas, and as gentle and affectionate as a lamb. She lives in the very depths of the ocean, but she has to come up to the surface every quarter of an hour or so to breathe, when she 'spouts' up the water through her nostrils, or blow-holes, as she is doing now, some eight or nine times running. She won't go down again for about ten minutes. Slip round in front

In Nature's School

of her and look in her mouth. In spite of its immense size, her gullet is only two inches across, and it is but the smallest fish that she can eat. To get enough of these she rushes through shoals of them with her mouth wide open, and millions are caught in the 'baleen' or whalebone plates at the side of her jaws. When she thinks she has enough, she closes her mouth, and squeezes out the water she has taken in with the fish through the fringed ends of the whalebone."

Swimming in front of her as he was directed, Phil looked right into her enormous mouth, which was ten or twelve feet high, and large enough to engulf the little rose-covered cottage in which he had lived with his mother. The North Sea Whale closed the vast cavity with a snap, and spouted out more water. Phil, like the Nennook, thought her the most marvellous creature in the whole world.

As she sank back to the depths of the sea, the Nennook told him more about her; how the oil

Lord of the Snows

and whalebone, and the delicate "blubber" that was really her third skin, are so valued by man that whales are continually chased and killed.

"Their little ones are as dear to the whales as ours are to us," he said, "and when these are attacked the mothers become reckless, and are easily lured within reach of the cruel harpoons. Once I saw a whale dash a large boat to atoms by a single blow of her tail; but her young one was killed by that time, so it did not help her."

The Nennook that night tossed restlessly; the iceberg was nearing the shore, and he longed to feel the land under his feet again. As for Phil, he had gone with the night wind, and the Nennook saw him no more.

Chapter the Ninth

A Fragrant Land



KIES with no clouds to dim them; gay-plumaged birds and brilliant butterflies, flitting, like living gems, amongst the snow-white flowers and coral berries of the coffee plant; these met Phil's eyes on his first morning in Arabia.

He was on the slope of a broadly terraced hill, in the midst of a coffee plantation, where the delicate green of the young leaves rose high above. Gone was his thick fur coat, and the soles of his little bare feet were smooth again. It was as warm here as it had been cold on the ice fields; an exquisite butterfly, her jewel-like body poised lightly between two splendid wings of orange red, spotted and tipped with black, fluttered on a wave of heat.

A Fragrant Land

"Come up to the heights," she murmured, "and you shall see the daintiest little creature that ever trod the earth; a blade of grass would scarcely bend beneath her feet. Well was she named the Ariel."

She darted away in front of him, and Phil followed her idly. Where all things were so beautiful what did it matter at which he looked? The rapturous song of the sweet-voiced birds, and the fragrance of the warm air, made him dreamy with delight as he passed through the plantation, where a thousand streams from the great reservoir the Arabs had built above it rippled gently between its groves. Soft little breezes helped him along, and he climbed the heights without an effort. Ring-doves cooed him their familiar welcome from the spreading acacias which shaded his pathway; the grass was thick, and of a deep rich green; his feet sank into it as if it were a velvet carpet. The butterfly stayed her flight over a strange plant with smooth dark leaves.

In Nature's School

“Look at it well,” she murmured. “This is the Catha, or Kat plant, and its buds and leaves, when steeped in water, make the Arab forget his troubles. And this”—she left the Catha, and flew to a spreading balsam—“is where they find the myrrh that the wise men brought from the East, with gold and frankincense. Myrrh is the gum from the bark of the balsam, and Arabia has always been famed for its fragrant essences and spices.”

Phil rested awhile under the spacious branches, for he wanted also to hear about the coffee plant, and he knew by this time that the smallest creature might have something to teach him.

“Arabia was its first home,” said the butterfly, turning her slender antennæ in his direction. “Kaffa, whose name it bears still, is the place in which it was discovered, but no one thought of growing it in large quantities until the Arabs did so. Now it is cultivated in many regions of the world, and only a very small part of the coffee you drink really comes from Arabia. It is a lovely plant, for

A Fragrant Land

it is never out of season, and blossoms all the year round. The Thorny-tailed Lizard says that it will go on bearing fruit for 'a quarter of a century,' and that it grows to a height of forty feet."

"I s'pose you mean that it lives for twenty-five years," said Phil, rather proud of knowing what a century meant. "That's not so long. I used to swing in an oak tree once that mother told me was at least two hundred years old."

"It is longer than I can understand," said the butterfly quietly, "for my short life is nearly over. I love the flowers and the sunshine, and the soft winds; but my wings are tired."

She fluttered them daintily over a starry blossom of palest gold, and the minute, exquisitely-shaped scales that gave them their beauty caught every hue of the sunlight. Her long proboscis, through the hollow of which she drew out the sweetness from honey-bearing flowers, was as fine and delicate as a thread of glistening spun glass, and Phil thought her the Queen of butterflies.

In Nature's School

"Can you remember before you had wings?" he asked, looking at her with half-closed eyes as she poised herself over a flower.

The butterfly laughed softly—it was like the rustling of rose leaves—and her antennæ quivered.

"I remember all," she cried, "from the time that I was a tiny caterpillar, creeping out of my wee round egg, which was just the colour of the leaf on which my mother laid it. I was a crawling, worm-like little creature then, with sixteen short legs and a hairy body, and such a big appetite that I set to work at once to eat my way through the edge of a leaf with my strong mandibles. I had three simple eyes on either side of my head, very different from the large ones, composed of numerous facets, which I have now. I needed those eyes, every one of them; for birds and bats, and dragon flies and spiders, were all on the look out for me, as they are to-day. But now I can fly away from them; then, I could only crawl."

"How did you change into a butterfly?"

A Fragrant Land

“I cannot tell you. But when I had lived some weeks in the sunshine, and the soft rain that christened me had driven me many times for shelter under the spreading leaves, I began to grow weary of being a caterpillar. So I clung to a little twig of the coffee plant, and spun myself a tiny house in which no one could see me, where I might lie in peace. (I was glad to be able to do this, for I heard that most butterflies had to content themselves by winding a thread or two of silk round their bodies, to keep them suspended to a leaf.) A ‘chrysalis’ they called me then, I believe, but I only know that I was very drowsy and did not care to eat any more, or crawl in the sun. Each time that the wind rustled through the bushes it rocked my house, and presently I fell asleep.

“I woke one day to find my body tingling with life. Something had happened, and I struggled to free myself from my case of skin, which was all that was left now of my chrysalis. Then I ate my way through the thin ‘cocoon,’ and reached the

167

In Nature's School

air. . . . I was a butterfly—a real butterfly, and as lovely now as I had been ugly before. . . . For a little while I sat in the sun and dried my wings, for they were moist and crumpled. Then I shook them out, and was ready to fly.”

A sudden swoop from the branches of a balsam, and a tiny blue bird nearly put an end to the butterfly's life that instant. Phil rose to his feet, and a quaint little monkey, rollicking amongst the acacias, threw a leafy pellet at his yellow head. While Phil was wondering where this came from, both bird and butterfly disappeared.

So Phil resumed his way up the heights alone. The spreading trees gave place to stunted boxwood, and the grass that had been so pleasant to walk on was dry and withered now. It did not seem as if any creature could live there, and the rocks were almost as desolate as the Greenland snows. A sudden twist in the rugged pathway brought him to the edge of a chasm. Here he could see Arabia stretched out before him—its fertile slopes and



"Don't you know me?"

A Fragrant Land

grassy plains, and the sands of the desert burning yellow in the sun.

A shrill and prolonged whistle broke the silence as Phil looked down. Turning quickly, he saw ten goat-like animals, their strong curved horns marked with transverse ridges, standing some distance off, alert and watchful. The whistle was repeated by their leader, evidently an old male, and almost as quickly as the seals had leapt to their ice islands, they sprang to the highest points of rock and stood at bay.

Phil made a speaking trumpet of his hands.

"Don't you know me?" he called. "I'm Phil!"

Their leader whistled again, and this time the sound was one of reassurance. Springing from point to point with marvellous ease, the others formed in line in front of him, their quivering sides showing their natural fear of a stranger, in spite of their bold front. Their coats were reddish brown; a dark stripe passed straight up their faces and down to the end of their spines, and the fur underneath their

In Nature's School

bodies was a soft pale grey. Strength and endurance spoke from their every look; they were brave creatures, Phil was sure.

Advancing quickly, their leader butted at Phil in a friendly fashion, and introduced himself as an Ibex.

"We are all glad to see you," he added. "You will forgive us for having waited to make sure that you were a friend. Anything two-legged we fear, for we have learnt from experience that men are dangerous. If they meet us on our own ground, we turn at bay, and try to dash them from the rocks on which they stand. But they do not often give us the chance of doing this."

"You are so fleet," said Phil, "that I should have thought you would be sure to escape."

"Ah!" said the Ibex with a mournful toss of his horns, "the hunters don't play fair. When we have gained the loftiest crags, which even the boldest climber could not reach, they point a thing of wood at us, which shoots out fire; and so we die. You see that group of Ibexes on the opposite height? There

A Fragrant Land

are only seven of them there, you'll notice; there were ten yesterday."

"Then are there ten Ibexes in every troop?"

"Five or ten. These are our favourite numbers; I cannot tell you why, but so it has always been. Each troop is under a leader, and his lightest command is obeyed instantly. A second's hesitation, and our enemies might sight us."

"It must be hard to obey as quickly as that," remarked Phil thoughtfully. At home, and even at the Orphanage, as he explained to the Ibex, before he did what they told him he always wanted to know "just why."

"That wouldn't do here," was the reply. "An Ibex who did not obey instantly would be turned out of the troop. The Wild Ass, whom I see yonder, is as strict as we are about obedience, and I have heard that the splendid tribe of deer called the 'Wapiti' instantly trample a rebel to death."

The Wild Ass joined them as the Ibex spoke, and Phil was astonished to find him such a lordly

In Nature's School

beast. His eyes were full and mild, but sparkling with life, and his shapely body covered with sleek dark hair. His finely-cut nostrils dilated with each breath he drew.

"Is it true," he demanded of Phil, as the Ibex leapt to another crag, "that in the land from which you come we are but beasts of burden, our very name a mark of scorn?"

Phil blushed. He was thinking how often he himself had been called "as stupid as an ass," and of the poor draggled donkey who brought firewood to the Orphanage. Very shaggy and thin was he, and pitiful of mien. The splendid Wild Ass before him might have come from another world.

"The donkeys I knew in England did not look a bit like you," he said, "and they really *are* stupid. When you want them to go quickly, they usually stand quite still and stare at you. The one in our village used to lie down in the dust when the tinker tried to make him hurry."

The Wild Ass stamped his foot.

A Fragrant Land

“Ah,” he cried, “the poor brute has been half-starved and ill-treated until his spirit is broken, and his keen intelligence dulled. That is the way, they tell me, with all my kindred within your shores. Their patient service counts for nothing, and kicks and blows are ever their portion.

“The Arabs put you to shame,” he went on sternly, looking away to the distant plains. “Their beasts are their companions and trusted friends; an Arab would disown a man who abused his camel, even were he his brother, and his horses and his asses are famous all over the world.”

He cantered away as if he could not trust himself to say more. His hoofs rang out on the rocky path, and a startled Eagle looked down from his eyrie with longing eyes at the slender form of a Gazelle, just then appearing round a point of rock.

Treading as lightly as though she walked on air, as the Butterfly had said, she came to meet Phil trustfully. Her height at the shoulder was less than two feet, and her tiny body, covered with fawn

In Nature's School

coloured fur, tinted a rich dark brown, was a model of grace.

“Have you seen ‘Lightfoot’?” she asked him anxiously. “I have sought him since early morning. He left me at dawn, and has not yet returned. He has never been away so long before.”

Phil patted her gently.

“Perhaps he has gone further than he intended,” he said, consolingly. “Won’t you show me where you live?”

The Ariel gave a wistful glance at the heights beyond; then moved on lightly in front of Phil until she came to a flat tableland beside a stream. A baby Ariel bounded from a cleft in the rocks, and laying her dainty head against him, waited for his caresses.

“It is here that ‘Lightfoot’ brought me when first we mated,” her mother said, “and in spite of many dangers we have dwelt in safety.”

“Dangers?” asked Phil.

The Ariel lifted her head and scanned the far-off horizon.

A Fragrant Land

“Though the Arabs sometimes make pets of us, and treat us then like their own children, they hunt us mercilessly; for ‘sport,’ as well as for our tender flesh, and the value of our hides.

“Sometimes they trap us by means of a large enclosure, which they build near one of the streams or fountains where we go to drink at eve. Our sentinels are always on the watch, but the Arabs steal up so silently that even our keen eyes and scent are now and then at fault. If this should happen the Arabs surround us, and drive us into the enclosure.

“It is terrible then, for we are trapped, and can only escape by leaping through the gaps they have left in the rough stone walls. Each gap opens on to a deep pit, or trench, into which we fall, and are killed by hundreds. We know when we leap what is awaiting us; but with the shouts of the hunters ringing in our ears we are terrified out of our wits, and it is better to die like that than to stay and be killed in the enclosure. The Arabs have another

In Nature's School

way of catching us; but I don't want to think of that until 'Lightfoot' is safely home."

An Ariel rather darker in colour, and with finer horns, came towards them now. It was "Quick-as-the-wind," the chief of the herd, and he too seemed disturbed at "Lightfoot's" prolonged absence.

"It is not like him to stay from your side so long," he said to the little mother. Then, as if anxious to divert her mind, he turned to Phil.

"Shall we show you," he said, "how we keep the Wild Cat at bay should he seek his supper amidst our herd? We are so frail that if we did not act together we should be entirely at the mercy of any enemy who chose to attack us."

With a sound that in spite of its softness could be heard a great way off, "Quick-as-the-wind" moved into the open space. In a moment the crags around were alive with Ariels.

More like a flock of gentle birds than a herd of animals, they gathered swiftly together into a circle. The does and young ones were placed with

A Fragrant Land

Phil within its centre, while the old males, in a dense mass outside them, bent their heads forward at a sharp angle until their horns formed a row of pointed weapons which any small animal would hesitate to face. "Quick-as-the-wind" stamped his tiny foot, and the circle dissolved, to form again just as quickly at his next signal.

"All gazelles defend themselves from their foes in this manner," he said, when the disbanded Ariels were munching the soft grass, "and some of the larger species can successfully keep at bay a hungry jackal. I have been told that it was from watching our method of fighting that Man in olden times first thought of forming soldiers into the military 'square,' with bayonets fixed to meet the enemy."

He broke off abruptly, for the Ariel sentinels on the heights had sounded a warning; faintly on the breeze came the sharp baying of dogs. The Ariels vanished; "Quick-as-the-wind" was but a flying shadow on the mountain side.


In Nature's School

Nearer came the baying of the dogs. Phil could see now that they were powerful greyhounds. The hunters who rode after them bore keen-eyed falcons on their wrists. Released from their jesses, these quickly out-distanced the panting greyhounds, and, dropping down on the bewildered Ariels' heads, flapped their great wings in their faces until the little things fell to the ground with fright and exhaustion. A moment later the greyhounds came up, gasping for breath; their bared teeth gleamed, and their long red tongues were already tasting blood. . . . There was no hope now for the gentle creatures that Phil in one short hour had grown to love.

He put his fingers in his ears, and hid his face on his arms. When he lifted it, a long while after, there was silence again on the mountain side. As quickly as he could he made his way down the rocky pathway, and passed through the plantation of coffee plants without a thought now for their beauty. For his heart was sore.

Chapter the Tenth

"Ships of the Desert."

" WONDER where I shall find a camel," said Phil to himself. Not even the Arab horses, far-famed and lovely as they were, could for him compare in interest with the "ships of the desert," without whose aid, Nature had told him, the burning sands would be more impassable than tractless seas. He had seen a camel once in a travelling menagerie; a depressed and shaggy camel, with dim, lack-lustre eyes and a rough coat. He wondered if the camels in Arabia would look like that.

There was no breeze now, and the thin blue smoke that rose above the chimneys of the distant houses hung lazily in the sky. Phil had walked far

In Nature's School

since he left the mountain, and although a tawny butterfly with an oblique white bar across the tip of her forewings had stayed her flight in passing, it had only been to wish him a pleasant journey. The sands of the desert plains stretched far to left and right in the broiling sunshine, looking like tracts of gold. Phil's eyes were dazzled by the glare; he sought the shade of a palm tree and leant against its slender trunk.

Presently he became aware that something was watching him from a sandy bank not far away. It was a Lizard—surely the queerest lizard that Nature had ever made. His body was covered with shining scales, like those of most of his kindred, but his fat tail, ringed with thorn-like spines, was very curious, and his big teeth, set far apart in his funny mouth, were too large for his small round head.

He gazed at Phil in quizzical amusement, and asked him what he wanted in Arabia.

“To see a camel,” Phil replied, and the Lizard gave a dry little chuckle.

Ships of the Desert

"You will have to go down to the plains for that," he said, "and the wind will blow the sand into your eyes. Better stay here with me. The shade is pleasant, and dates are sweet."

Phil shook his head.

"I have come a long way to see the camel," he persisted. "Have I far to go before I shall find him?"

The Thorny-tailed Lizard—for this was he—blinked several times before he spoke again.

"Not far for you," he said at last, "for Nature has given you invisible wings to your feet. Before you go have a look at my burrow. It is a simple little affair, but very comfortable, and when I tuck my head and body inside it I am quite safe. If the Arabs, who find me as dainty eating as they do locusts, try to pull me out by my tail, it comes off in their hands, and I grow another. He! he! he!"

The Lizard was quite a character in his way, and Phil spent a pleasant half-hour with him. His burrow, though only a deep long hole in the sand-

In Nature's School

bank, was very cosy, and Mrs Thorny-tail was most intelligent. She had a great deal to say to Phil about a demure red locust who showed some inclination to bite him as he bade her farewell at the entrance to the burrow.

“He belongs to the same family as the grasshoppers,” she remarked, as, much discomfited at what she said to him, the locust flew away. “But instead of leaping through the air as they do, he uses his strong wings, which carry him very far.”

“He scarcely looks large enough to do all the harm they say,” said Phil, who had heard of him from the butterfly. “I should have thought him quite a harmless creature if I had not known.”

“A swarm of his family can make a green land desolate,” returned the Lizard. “Small things can do much mischief, as you will learn when you grow older. There is nothing safe from locusts. They have even been known in the Strait of Ormuz to settle on a ship, and, by devouring the sails and cordage, oblige the captain to stay his course. What? You

Ships of the Desert

are still thinking about your camels? Well, ask for 'Maherry' when you reach the Arabs' dwellings. He is the fleetest Heirie in Arabia."

"Is a 'Heirie' the same as a camel?" Phil inquired. But the Thorny-tailed Lizard had already tucked her head into her burrow, and soon was lost to sight.

A Weaver-Bird fluttered from the palm tree in a state of wild alarm.

"There's a viper under that stone," she cried. "Do send him off. He makes my heart beat so that I can scarcely hear myself twitter."

Phil turned it over, and a snake wriggled away as if he had no wish that Phil should see his face. The Weaver-Bird thanked Phil with many words.

"He has been watching me all the morning," she said, "with those dreadful eyes of his. I am thankful that he has gone, though my young ones have flown now, and my mind is at peace. Won't you stay and look at my nest? We made it all ourselves, I and my mate, and it is quite worth seeing."

In Nature's School

It hung from a fairly high branch, and could only be reached by means of a long narrow entrance, most elaborately woven of grass and twigs, somewhat in the shape of an old-fashioned netted purse. This, she told him, was to keep away poisonous snakes and mischievous monkeys, who would otherwise have helped themselves to her eggs, or feasted upon her fledglings.

“We had to keep a sharp look out, their father and I,” she added, putting her small black head pensively on one side as she thought of the troubles of married life, “for birds have many enemies here. Sometimes we hang our nests from the boughs of trees on the bank of a stream or river, but then there are water rats as well as snakes, and it is wonderful how far they can jump.”

And on she chattered, giving Phil her history from the day of her birth, and confiding to him how grieved her mate had been in spring because he could not sing.

“But when we began to build our nest,” she

Ships of the Desert

went on happily, "he was too busy to think about such nonsense, and there is no good in crying for what you cannot have! If you will wait a little while you will see him. Are you going far?—'To find Maherry?' Why, you are almost there. Just go straight on until you come to a house with a white mark over the lintel. He lives in the shed beside it."

Following her directions, Phil steered his course by the blue smoke that he had seen in the distance, and presently found the house that she had described. It was roughly built and very old; it looked as if it had been there for centuries. The door of the shed was open, and Phil slipped quietly in. A slender camel, resting on the ground in a kneeling position, looked solemnly up at him from beneath his long thick lashes, and waited for him to speak.

"Are you Maherry?" he said, touching the reddish-grey coat that for all its thickness was as soft as silk.

"I am Maherry," the camel answered, stirring a

In Nature's School

little so that Phil might find room beside him on his couch of date leaves. "I have just come a long journey across the desert, and my limbs are weary, or I would rise."

"Why do they call you the 'Heirie'? You look just like the one-humped camel I saw in my picture book, and he was a Dromedary."

Maherry raised his head.

"I am sometimes called that too. Dromedaries or 'Heiries' are one and the same animal. Heiries are more slenderly built and far more fleet than ordinary camels, whether they are one-humped and Arabian, or Baṭrian, with two humps. To an Arab 'Fleet as the Heirie' means 'fleet as the wind.' We are the camels of Oman, and can travel through the desert without stopping for several days and nights. Thus we reach the end of our journeys quickly, and our masters cry: 'It is well!' In days of old the Arabs said: 'When thou shalt meet a Heirie and say to the rider "Peace be between us," ere he shall have answered "There is peace between

Ships of the Desert

us," he will be far off, for his swiftness is like the wind.' "

"Are they kind to you, these masters of yours, Maherry?"

The Heirie laughed softly.

"Ay," he said, "or we should not serve them half so well. The service of love is swifter than the service of fear; the Turks, who treat their camels more as you do the Ass in England, find them neither so willing nor so tractable, though all camels are by nature patient, and strong to endure. Here in Arabia a young camel is fondled as if it were a baby. 'A child is born to us,' cry our master's family; and silver charms are hung on our heads and about our necks, while we are encouraged to take our first steps by music and song."

The Heirie paused. The tinkling of bells came softly through the open door, and Phil, looking eagerly round it, saw a long procession of camels wending its way through the town. They were heavily laden, and trod as if they were very tired.

In Nature's School

As they reached an open space behind the market their masters called a halt.

“It is four o'clock, and the end of one stage of their journey,” said Maherry. “Go you and watch them; and do not give too much heed if they dispute with each other when they are unloaded. It is the end of the day, and their burdens were heavy.”

Phil drew the door of the Heirie's shed quickly behind him, and hastened through the market place, where another time he would have wished to linger. Pink and white sweetmeats were spread out temptingly; luscious black figs, and grapes and peaches covered the low stalls; sweet-smelling spices and aromatic herbs made the air fragrant, and dark-skinned Arabs showed weapons and ornaments, cunningly wrought in precious metals. But it was only the camels Phil wanted to see just then, and he did not stop until he had reached them.

They were much larger than the Heirie; most of them were brown, but some light grey, and one, who bore the heaviest load of all, a snowy white.

Ships of the Desert

His master called him "Aleppo," and chided him gently for his weariness. Phil made himself known to him as he knelt to be unloaded, throwing the weight of his body on the thick elastic pads that Nature had given him on his broad chest and on each elbow and knee of his fore-limbs. These elastic cushions, Phil saw, were on the front of his hind knees too, and smaller ones upon his hocks.

"This is so that in kneeling, our natural position of rest, wherever the weight of our bodies is thrown, our shins are protected," said Aleppo. "I am hungry and thirsty now, but presently we will talk."

The unloading of the Camels took some time. As they were released from their burdens they rose to their feet again, and the way in which some of them scuffled and kicked their neighbours reminded Phil of Maherry's words. It was strange to see them wrestling together, now and then giving each other an apparently savage bite, and Phil was glad when the Arabs brought them their evening

In Nature's School

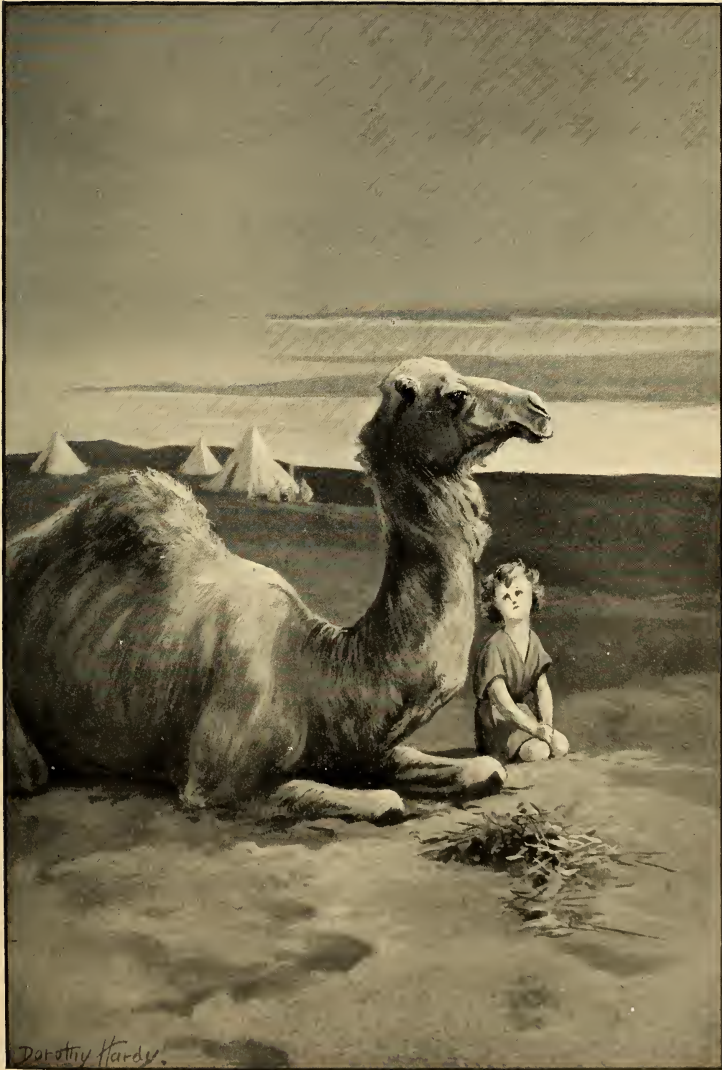
meal—date leaves and thorny shrubs, with leaves and branches of the tamarisk tree, and some dry black beans that looked as hard as stones. But the camels, kneeling round the baggage, scrunched them thankfully, their strong teeth making this an easy matter, and drew in leaves and branches with their cleft lips. Ere long Aleppo, declaring himself refreshed, suggested that Phil should come close beside him, so that they could talk more easily.

As Phil leant comfortably against his hump he was struck with its ungainliness, and asked:

“Don’t you wish you hadn’t a hump, Aleppo?”

Aleppo nearly upset him by the sudden start he gave.

“Why, my hump is my greatest treasure,” he replied. “But for that, I should have often dropped from starvation when provisions ran short in the desert. When a camel once falls it seldom rises to its feet again, and the Vultures claim it as their own. The first thing an Arab does when he is



Phil and Aleppo

Ships of the Desert

starting on a journey is to look to his animal's hump, for without the nourishment stored up for him in this, the camel would often be in a bad way. Once our humps are exhausted, it takes three or four months of rest and good feeding to bring them up again."

"But *how* do you 'feed' on them, Aleppo?"

"We absorb the fat of which they are composed into our system," said Aleppo, "just as, in colder regions of the earth, the bears, during their long winter sleep, live on the thick layer of fat stored up for them during the autumn beneath their skins."

"Is there water in your hump, too?" asked Phil. "I often used to wonder when I heard about you how you can go as many days without it as they say you do when you are crossing the desert."

"No," said Aleppo, with a wide grin. "We hold our stores of water in what you might call a 'reservoir' of deep honeycomb cells inside our paunch. These cells hold altogether as much as six

In Nature's School

quarts of fluid, and when we have taken a long drink the mouth of each cell contracts, so that the water is prevented from mixing with our food.

“Some camels can go longer without drinking than others, This is because they can dilate these cells, and so carry a larger supply of water. It is said”—his voice became very mournful, and he stopped scrunching the dry beans—“that rather than die of thirst the Arabs have been known to kill us in the wilderness, that they might steal the water yet remaining in our cells! But I can scarcely believe it!”

Phil was deeply impressed.

“Is there any other animal in the world so wonderfully made as you are?” he asked.

Aleppc looked at him with a kind smile, for he, in common with every living creature, was glad to be appreciated.

“There are many just as wonderful in their own way,” he said, “but the only other animal I know of who has this ‘reservoir’ inside him is the Llama.

Ships of the Desert

In the mountainous regions of Chili and Peru he fills our place as servant to man."

Phil waited to hear more, but Aleppo was wrapped in thought.

The dusk had gathered; the sellers from the market place had gone away, and as the brilliant stars flamed in the heavens one by one, a hush fell over the scene. Suddenly Aleppo raised his head; from afar off came the jangling of many bells, the sound of flutes and flageolets, of the beating of drums and of shouts of exultation.

"It is a caravan of pilgrims," said Aleppo, "on their way to the Holy City, where, enthroned upon a camel, Mohammed gave the law. The pilgrims travel by night; they started only a few hours since, and this is not one of their halting places, so you will see them pass."

The cavalcade came nearer. Phil could see now the lighted torches that the pilgrims waved; their yellow flames lit up the scene, and shone on the silver trappings of the foremost camels. Streamers

In Nature's School

of coloured silk floated above their heads or trailed behind them; the saddles of the Heiries were of the richest velvet, purple and blue, and necklaces of coral and amber hung below their bridles. The swarthy faces of their riders shone with fervour as they played their flutes, or sang their hymns of praise, and the satin-skinned Arab horses, who formed a minor part of the cavalcade, pranced and curveted as the torch light gleamed on their polished sides.

“Poor things,” said Aleppo with a pitying look. “When the fierce rays of the sun stream down upon them, and their hoofs sink deeply into the shifting sands, they will suffer tortures. Many die on these pilgrimages before the journey is half over, for Nature has not fitted them, as she has us, to cross the desert.”

“Tell me about them!” entreated Phil, as the beautiful creatures still came on, their eyes flashing with pride of race, and every line of their slender bodies a thing of beauty.

Ships of the Desert

“They are famous all the world over,” said Aleppo; “so famous that it is difficult now for even an Arab Sheik to increase his stud. To be accounted of pure lineage, an Arab horse must belong to one of the five breeds which are said to be descended from King Solomon’s favourite mares! Their pedigrees are written in parchment; they are contained in the little pouches their masters hang round their necks. Arab horses do not know the meaning of a blow, and because they have never been roughly treated they are as gentle as they are brave. They neither jib nor rear, and in spite of their small size are full of fire and courage.”

The Arab horses passed, and yet the cavalcade streamed on. Now there were camels again, still more resplendent in their trappings than those that had gone before. Embroideries of gold and silver bedecked their saddles, and glittered beneath the robes of flowing white which are the Arabs’ native dress. One pure grey Heirie was decked with ostrich feathers, and had his bridle studded with rubies and

In Nature's School

emeralds, and gleaming topaz. His master was the Emir Hadgi, the commander of the pilgrimage.

"I once took part in a pilgrimage myself," said Aleppo reflectively, when the last of the cavalcade was out of sight. "Even for me, trained as I was to go long distances, it was a hard struggle to endure to the end. There was a terrible sand storm, and water failed; the wells, when we reached them, were all dried up, and but few of the pilgrims survived."

Aleppo paused. He was thinking of the strange fascination of the desert in spite of all its terrors, and of the wonderful pictures he had seen in the desert sky that men called "mirages." They were of shady groves and flowing rivers, and many a time had Aleppo seen them as he pressed on through the sands, with head held high, so that he might scan the horizon for the longed-for oasis. He turned to speak of these to Phil; but his little companion, he saw, had meantime drifted off to dream-land.

Chapter the Eleventh

"All Glory Fades"



PHIL was awakened by more tinkling of bells. The caravan was about to start, and Aleppo, the last to be loaded, told him to sit in front of his pack, so that he might

go with them a part of the way.

"You will know then what it is to cross the desert," he said. And Phil, a little surprised that he had so far escaped the Arabs' notice, tucked himself in between two bales of silk. He was relieved when Aleppo explained to him that only animals could see him now.

The desert was very beautiful—that was what Phil thought first. The bright sands on the drifted heaps, that changed their form with every puff

In Nature's School

of wind, looked like beaten gold in the sunlight; the cloudless dome of the blue sky, so crystal clear that it might have been mirrored water, spanned the unbroken plains, where the black shadows of the great rocks stood out sharp and distinct as slabs of ebony.

Aleppo lowered his beetling brows as a storm of sand swept over the caravan, and on each side of his nose he shut down his lid-like nostrils as we do the lid of a box. His feet, furnished with soft elastic cushions, that left only the horn-covered tips of his toes free, trod easily in the loose sand; he moved as silently as if shod with velvet, and Phil soon grew accustomed to the motion made by his long strides. He was glad to listen while Aleppo talked, which he did at intervals in a low tone.

"Camels are almost the only animals in the world," he said, "of which no wild members of their family now exist. For thousands of years we have been used as beasts of burden, and no other animals could take our place."

All Glory Fades

Then he told Phil of the days of ancient times, when lions had been common in Arabia, and their attacks were nightly dreaded. The thought of lions made Phil straighten himself and look eagerly ahead.

“Are there lions here still?” he said.

“In some districts,” replied Aleppo. “I have heard, but know not if it be true, that an old lion, once famous for his great strength, still haunts a deserted village on the borders of which we pass. He was called the Strong One, and many feared him. His eyes were like shafts of lightning, and his roar more awful than thunder.”

The camels wended their way through the desert at a steady pace of some three miles an hour, but though the Arabs crooned many songs to enliven the journey, Phil found the hours pass slowly. About four o'clock the camels were unloaded, to get what nourishment they could from the thorny shrubs growing here and there amongst the sand. The leaves looked dry and withered, but Aleppo

199

In Nature's School

ate them thankfully. If these did not fail him, and water held out, he would be content. In order that he might not wander too far, his master had tied his forelegs together, and Phil kept close beside him as he hobbled about in search of food. For though he knew the Arabs could not see him, he was happier when not beneath their sad dark eyes.

Soon after sunset the camels were called to kneel beside the baggage, that they might settle for the night. The Arabs unfurled their tents, looking ghostlike in their white garments as they moved about. The distant yell of a hyena mingled with their strange voices, and a wave of homesickness swept over Phil.

"This is not so nice as the woods," he murmured, as he rested his head on Aleppo's hump.

"The green plains are beyond," returned the camel, and Phil was ashamed that he should have heard him grumble.

Morning came after night, and night after morning, each so like the other that Phil was surprised

All Glory Fades

when Aleppo told him that they had been traveling for five days.

"They will give us water to-night," he said; and when the camels were unloaded the Arabs took down the water skins, and shared their contents with the animals who had borne them.

And how thirsty they were! They could have drunk far more deeply had they been allowed, but the sun had drawn some of the precious water back to himself, and, though the journey was but beginning, the skins were not nearly so full as they should have been.

"It will be all right soon," said Aleppo hopefully. "They will replenish them from Mohammed's well, which has never failed us yet."

But when they came to it they found it empty, and a deep gloom spread over the caravan. The Arabs scarcely spoke save to encourage their camels, who plodded on patiently, making no complaint. Even the sparse thorn bushes had disappeared, and the Vultures, like grim spectres,

In Nature's School

marked their way. There was no sign of water, and the camels lifted their long necks and sniffed in vain.

The days wore on. Another well, on which they had built their hopes, was found to be empty too, and even the darkness scarcely brought relief from the great heat. A camel fell to the ground from exhaustion; the Arabs removed his pack, dividing its weight between his comrades, and sadly left him there to die.

"It is a bad look out," said Aleppo. "Call you the night wind, that she may take you where the woods are green. It will hurt you to see us suffer, and alas! you can do no good."

"I shall not call her until all is well with you," said Phil, though he longed for the sight of waving trees and running water. He often dreamt now of the crystal stream by which he had played with Feathertail, where the ferns drooped over the small blue flowers that were so like forget-me-nots. How pleasant it would be there, with Feathertail to play

All Glory Fades

with, and the birds to sing to him. . . . But Phil knew that it was wrong to leave a friend in trouble; and Aleppo was his friend. He, too, must learn to endure. It was a hard lesson, for though, as Nature had promised, he felt neither thirst nor hunger, it was bad enough to see the suffering he could not help. The hump Aleppo had been so proud of had nearly gone; his mouth and throat were swollen from thirst, and the other camels were even in worse plight.

“If you made a fuss,” Phil said, “I don’t think I should mind so much. But none of you ever grumble—you just go on.”

“It’s the only way,” said Aleppo, trying to be cheerful still. “When your feet are weary and the road is hard, there is nothing for it but to go straight on. Grumbling won’t help you; patience and courage will.”

One day, when even Aleppo had given up hope, the foremost camel lifted his head and sniffed. He quickened his pace; the camel behind him hastened,

In Nature's School

too, and through the caravan passed a thrill of joy—the camels had scented water! It was far off yet—so far that not for another hour did the welcome sight of a green oasis meet the wild eyes of the fainting Arabs, whose stiff, dry lips refused to form the words that would urge the camels forward.

But words were not needed. New life had come to the dragging limbs of the patient creatures, and their burdens had grown light. In twenty minutes the caravan had reached the oasis, and with a loud cry the Arabs flung themselves on the ground beside the deep, cool stream, under the shade of the date trees. The camels, patient as ever, waited for their turn; then, as they drank, their weariness was forgotten.

For two nights and a day the caravan halted in the oasis, whose deep, rich green glowed like some splendid emerald in the dull gold of that arid waste. The ruddy fruit of the pomegranate tree weighed down its branches; the stately date palms, festooned

All Glory Fades

with vines, sheltered and fed both men and camels. Never was shade more welcome.

But it would not do to linger; the Arabs and their merchandise were already overdue, and they were not yet at their journey's end. Very early in the morning after the second night the camels were reloaded, and the caravan started once more. They stepped out bravely, though it was easy to see how their humps had dwindled, and the songs of the Arabs were hymns of praise to the great "Allah" who had spared them the terrors of death in the wilderness.

"In a little while," said Aleppo, "our wanderings will be over for a space. To-morrow we shall pass the deserted village of which I told you, where the Arabs say the old lion lingers still."

They reached it soon after dusk next day, and Phil slipped quietly from Aleppo's back and gave him a farewell hug.

"I shall never forget you," he said earnestly,

In Nature's School

“and I’ll try to be patient and go straight on when the road is hard.”

“That’s right,” said Aleppo. “Go straight on and do your best, that you may not fall by the way. To suffer patiently, the Arabs say, is to be greater than kings.”

Phil watched the caravan out of sight. When the jangling of the camels’ bells grew so faint that he could scarcely hear them, he turned aside and entered the village.

The portals of the ruined huts were thick with dust, and the gardens which once upon a time had been filled with blossom were choked with sand and noxious weeds. The broken windlass of the well, long since dried up, was rusty with age, and the dismal howl of the hyena seemed fitting music for so grim a scene.

A belt of stunted trees grew by a heap of rock beyond the well. Was it his fancy, Phil wondered, or did he really see some great gaunt form moving between their twisted trunks? He moved nearer;



“Who calls me?”

All Glory Fades

the deepening twilight made it impossible for him to be sure whether his sight had not misled him.

“Are you there, O Strong One?” he called. A loud roar answered him—a roar so thunderously terrible that fear sprang suddenly upon him and clutched his heart-strings. He drove it back immediately, and did not even flinch when Something detached itself from the shadows and came towards him with stealthy tread. Two eyes of fire, watchful and menacing, looked into his. It was the old lion, his massive form wasted by sickness. His great tail lashed angrily from side to side, as though he would not submit with patience to intrusion.

“Ah, I know now,” he said, when Phil timidly reminded him of Nature’s promise. “You find me in an evil hour, for age has come upon me. I am no longer ‘The Strong One’ at whose name the Arab shuddered, while his horses shrieked with fear. The meanest hyena dares to mock me now; it had been well for me had I died in my full strength.”

In Nature's School

The great beast moved back slowly to the shelter of the rocks, and there lay silent for awhile. The roar that he had given in answer to Phil's call had exhausted his failing strength, and as the moon rose high in the sky his head drooped mournfully.

"But a few short years ago," he said, "and I was in my prime. My muscles were as firm as iron; my powerful limbs could leap for incredible distances through the air, and I could strike an ox or heifer to the ground with a single stroke. My tawny coat, the colour of the desert sands through which I loved to roam, was close as velvet, and although my mane was not so long as that of the lions in Africa, it was sufficiently flowing and abundant to make me the admired of all my kindred. My flying feet, armed with strong claws which I can sheathe at will, bore me long distances in search of prey. My lioness and my cubs knew not the meaning of hunger; they supped each night on the tender flesh of plump young heifers, sheep or goats, and if they hunted it was only for

All Glory Fades

the pleasure of it. They did not need to kill. Those were good days."

Phil wondered if the "plump young heifers" had enjoyed themselves equally well. As he gazed reflectively ahead, he saw a big hyena lurking in the shade of a ruined temple; another, some distance off, repeated the horrible laugh that Phil had heard before. It was accompanied by the wildest gestures; the animal rose on his hind legs and rocked himself from side to side in a paroxysm of goblin mirth to which it was terrible to listen.

"He waits for me," said the old lion grimly. "When the breath has left my body, and the limbs that they fear still have no longer power to strike even a feeble blow, he and his comrades will swarm around me and tear my flesh, sharing the spoil with the vultures against their will."

Another outburst of awesome laughter drove Phil to bury his head in the lion's mane. The old lion uttered a low cry of tenderness; Phil made him think of his last cub, and it was long since he had

In Nature's School

felt anything young and tender nestling against him.

“The natives sometimes call laughing hyenas ‘Tiger Wolves,’” he went on presently. “They hate them far more bitterly than they do us, and with good reason—though if there were no hyenas to devour the refuse they throw out into their streets and pathways, plague and pestilence would soon be in their midst. No flesh, however rank and putrid, is too decayed for the hyena, whose jaws are of mighty power and whose appetite is insatiable.”

“Then if the natives find them so useful, why do they hate them so?”

“Because, unlike ourselves, who seldom actually attack man unless in self defence or driven by hunger, a certain number of hyenas prefer human flesh to any other, and they are such pitiful cowards that they would rather seize little children from their mother's arms than meet a man in fair fight.

“Curiously enough, the hyena is one of the few animals who is not scared away by fire. On dark nights he will steal past the Arabs' watch fires into

All Glory Fades

their encampments while they are sleeping, creeping through the cattle picketed in the enclosure outside their tents without touching a single heifer; for when he is after human flesh the hyena disdains all other. He enters the tents so silently that no one is disturbed. If the sleepers are full grown, he slinks away as silently as he came; but should a baby be resting by its mother's side, he will seize it in his horrible jaws, and disappear before she has time to wake. No weeping or wailing will bring it back to her; and so she hates the hyena."

The old lion stirred, and Phil noticed the length of the "whiskers" on either side of his nose. The Strong One explained that so exquisite was the sense of touch of these "feelers," that by their aid alone he could find his way through the dark.

Then he showed Phil his marvellous tongue, which, in common with all the Cat tribe, was covered with a multitude of tiny conical curved points. These were useful, he said, to strip the flesh from his prey, and Phil had to listen to many stories

In Nature's School

of successful raids upon the sheep and oxen of the wandering Bedouins.

“One tribe,” he said, his dimmed old eyes burning bright again, “had long vowed vengeance against me, and when they tracked me to the deep thicket where I hid by day, they planned that night to attack and kill me. Their warriors gathered in the shades of evening, some on horseback, some on foot, and all, doubtless, full of pride at their great daring. It took many of them to hunt one lion!

“When it was quite dark—there was no moon, I remember, and at first the stars were hidden by clouds—they approached my thicket warily, the mounted Bedouins coming first. At a short distance away from me they halted, and formed themselves into three rows—the first to attack, the second to defend the first should the fight be going against them, and the third consisting of the best marksmen of them all.

“Calling me by every ill name of which they could think, the Bedouins in the foremost row rode to

All Glory Fades

my lair. Stung by their insults, I rushed out furiously; and so great was the name that I bore for strength and daring that, though they had wished for this, their courage failed them.

“‘The Strong One! He comes!’ they cried, falling back before me, while their marksmen levelled their long sticks which spat out fire.

“It was so dark that my gleaming eyes were all they had to aim at, and already my frightful roaring had caused some of the horses to stampede. Bees with hard noses whizzed round me, but they passed over my head or stuck in my flesh, where they did no harm; I have one in my shoulder now, and whenever it pricks I think of those Arab chiefs, who proved themselves to be cowards at heart.

“‘He is here—he is here!’ they cried in confusion, as I turned to rend them with my claws. Then I dashed through their ranks, and fled to the desert, satisfied to know that some of those warriors”
—how fine was the scorn in the old lion’s voice!—
“would bear my marks to their dying day.”

In Nature's School

The Strong One's voice trailed into silence, and he composed himself as though to sleep. His breath came fitfully; his wasted limbs lay flat against the ground. Phil bent to stroke him, and he opened his glazing eyes. "Farewell," he cried. "Remember—all glory fades." Then he lay very still.

The prowling hyenas came nearer, skulking through the shadows with stealthy tread . . . The night wind swept through the stunted trees, and caught Phil quickly away.

"We will go to the jungle," she whispered, "and you shall see the Gorilla King."

Chapter the Twelfth

An Unloved King.



HE Gorilla King raised his head from the trunk of the great tree against which he had slept, and tried to remember what had made him "see red" the night before.

It was early still, and the sun had not yet pierced his way through the tangled jungle of the African forest; but the gorgeous parrots roosting in the thick vines were already stirring, and a Civet Cat, seeking her morning meal, stole through the bushes and looked up longingly. The Gorilla King caught sight of her, and scowled so horribly that she fled away.

He was an ugly monster. Phil, watching him from behind a giant palm tree, thought him too

In Nature's School

hideous for words. His frowning brows hung low over fierce dark eyes; his thick-set jaw looked cruel and sullen, and his great body was covered with coarse black hair that was tipped with white. He was King of the Forest, Phil had heard; he was glad that he was not his subject.

The great beast raised himself and stood erect; his knees turned outward, and his long arms, with their black-palmed hands, hung loosely from his shoulders. As memory came back to him, his features were convulsed with rage, and his curled-back lips displayed his yellow fangs. Beating his breast, he gave vent to a succession of piercing yells, beginning in a low key and extending higher and higher until the forest rang with the unearthly sounds.

“Isn’t it awful?” whispered a small monkey, swinging himself down to Phil from the boughs of a cotton tree. “His eldest wife offended him last night, and he all but killed her in his rage. There she is—under the branches opposite. She is better



The Ourang-outang

An Unloved King

this morning, but frightened out of her life.”

Huddled up under a Mango tree was the Queen Gorilla, leaning her head on her hands in such a human way that Phil was startled. Grouped around her were other gorillas of various sizes, all part of the King's family. They seemed sorry for the poor Queen, and one of the younger wives threw her arm round her as if in sympathy. She took it quickly away again as the King stared savagely at her and yelled more loudly than ever.

“Come away,” whispered the monkey, close to Phil's ear, “he'll go on like that for the next hour. It's his way of letting off steam. Then his wives and their little ones will bring him some of the red fruit that grows at the root of the Batuna, and nuts from the oil palms, and juicy tendrils of the vine; if he accepts them there will be peace for a time, but he has an ugly temper.”

“What is the matter with him?” asked Phil, as he scampered off with the monkey, using his arms, as he had no tail, to fling himself from branch to

In Nature's School

branch, and getting on very well indeed. The monkey, who had a fringe of white hair round his comical little face, and a big white spot in the centre of it to which he owed his name of "White-Nose," stopped swinging and gave a thoughtful twist to his lips.

"He's out with the world," he said, "and we often wonder why. He does as he likes in the forest, and reigns supreme—even the Chimpanzees, who are far more clever than he, and twice as active, never dispute his Kingship, and leopards and panthers give him a wide berth."

"Perhaps he gets his own way too much?" suggested Phil, and White-Nose thought there might be something in this.

They were some distance from the Gorilla now, but the sound of his shrieks still pursued them. A bird, whose wings of burnished gold were tinted with emerald and sapphire, flew out of her nest as White-Nose passed; and the sun, piercing at last through the thick jungle, showed Phil her won-

An Unloved King

drous beauty. She must be a fairy princess, he thought, who had been carried away from her home by a Gorilla, and was now a prisoner in the jungle. He wanted to ask her how she could be rescued, but White-Nose was already introducing him to a large number of his friends and relatives, who had just now surrounded them, and were all talking together.

At the tip of the biggest branch sat a venerable White-Nose with the air of a grandfather. Behind him, one after another, with arms on each other's shoulders, were a long row of monkeys, who peeped at Phil sideways and chattered with all their might. So far as he could make out they were saying what a curious little creature he was himself! The venerable White-Nose commanded silence, and was instantly obeyed.

"Look at the shape of his arms," he said, just as if he were taking a class in school, and pointing at Phil as he stood on the ground. "You will notice that they are much shorter than ours, and his legs

In Nature's School

look very queer. His hands are quite different too, with long thumbs instead of short ones. He has no more tail than a Chimpanzee, and the skin of his face is bare. Whether he has hair on his body I cannot say; perhaps he will take off his coat and let us see."

But Phil refused. "I think I would rather not," he said uneasily, wondering what they would want him to do next.

His curls seemed to distress the old monkey as much as they had done Bruno; he pulled them gently, to see if they would come out; then tried to arrange his pet son's hair in the same way. Presently he gave up the attempt in despair, and again called the chattering troop of monkeys to order.

"I am going to put them through their drill," he said. "We live in 'schools,' and I, the eldest amongst them and a great-grandfather, am at their head. Now, my children, show our visitor what you would do if we were threatened with danger. Fly!"

An Unloved King

They fled. The boughs were empty, and the venerable White-Nose chuckled.

“That was a good way to get rid of them,” he said. “They will not dare to come back until I say all’s safe. Now I should like to hear your story; where you come from and what you are.”

This was rather turning the tables, and Phil had to answer questions now instead of asking them. The monkey was most interested in hearing about his life at school, and could not understand why he should have objected so much to his school-fellows’ pranks.

“Young things wouldn’t be young things,” he said, indulgently, “if they didn’t tease one another. You’ll have to turn over a new leaf when you go home, and give and take. But that Dick Thorp of yours makes me think of the Gorilla, who is cunning and sullen, and a tyrant, too. He hasn’t a friend in the forest, and is only obeyed through fear. Now with the Chimpanzees it is quite different. They are gentle enough, with all their strength,

In Nature's School

and live most happily together. You could not have a better guide than Kamba to show you round the jungle; if you look through that grove of cotton trees you will see him coming for you. One of the forest creatures must have told him you were here."

"Kamba" was a Chimpanzee, and even a first glance showed that he and the Gorilla had little in common, though their hairy bodies were somewhat of the same shape. His ugly face had a sort of wistful kindness, and his voice, as he asked if Phil were there, was much less harsh. His eyes were mild and gentle, and lighted up as Phil replied.

"I have been expecting you," he said. "The night wind told us you were coming. The jungle is at its best just now, and there are many creatures here that you might like to see. Have you ever met the Pichey Armadillo? He's a funny little fellow, and very proud of being the only one of his species who lives in Africa. It is not often you find him in the jungle, for he prefers the sandy plains. I saw him under the bushes just now; yes—here he is!"

An Unloved King

The Pichey Armadillo, a little animal cased in an armour of horny plates, like all his kin, had been hunting for insects, which formed his staple article of food. He was little more than a foot in length, and seemed most anxious to escape their notice. With a few rapid movements of his feet he scooped a hole in the ground, and disappeared into this as if he were performing a conjuring trick.

"He's very unsociable," complained the Chimpanzee, "and never stops to say 'good morning.' He sleeps by day, and in the night prowls round for food. He can live for months without drinking water, and wages war on all young snakes. It is a pity that he has gone."

"I would much rather talk to you," said Phil, and Kamba, plainly gratified, linked his arm in his and walked along beside him for a few steps, as nearly erect as it is possible for an ape to be.

"We are not formed to walk on two legs," he said after a few minutes, dropping down on all fours again. "Our knees are always more or less

In Nature's School

bent, and this makes it impossible for us to move in the same way that you do. You are the only animal that can walk upright, they say. Perhaps that's why you are so different from all of us."

The moist air of the jungle grew hotter and more oppressive as the sun rose higher. Vines clustered densely from tree to tree, and blossoms of gold and purple hung from the giant-stemmed creepers that festooned their branches. Sweet-smelling vanillas shed their fragrance far and wide, and everywhere was a tangled mass of green. A thousand strange sounds fell on Phil's ears. Loudest amongst these was one that reminded him of the barking of dogs; it came from the branches of an enormous tree—so large that on each of its spreading boughs, which were almost as thick at their rounded ends as where they joined the trunk, a lad of sixteen could have stretched himself in comfort. From the end of these sprang smaller branches, with light green leaves and golden fruit, the size of cucumbers, hanging from twisted stalks. The

An Unloved King

trunk, Phil guessed, would take at least twenty men with arms outstretched to form a circle round it. It was truly a forest giant.

“This is the Baobab, or monkey-bread tree,” said Kamba, “and its fruit is our favourite food. The trunks of these trees are often hollow with decay from their great age, and hold a store of water which in other districts the natives tap. The hollow in this tree is as large as a fair-sized room.”

While Phil was still gazing at the Baobab in amazement, his new friend took him gently by the nape of his neck with one hand, and drew him up with him into its thick green canopy.

Some eighteen or twenty chimpanzees, whose excited speech was the “barking” which Phil had heard, were seated on its wide branches. They were presided over by an old fellow who appeared to be full of years and honours.

“Here is the boy, my father,” said Kamba.

“He is welcome!” declared Prince Chim, smiling at Phil with genial warmth. “Since you

In Nature's School

may not care to be the Gorilla's guest," he added, addressing him personally, "perhaps you will be ours."

Phil was delighted, for he had taken a great fancy to Kamba, and liked the look of all the chimpanzees. So he shook hands with Prince Chim, and nodded to the rest, who eyed him curiously.

"A grave matter has arisen," explained Prince Chim, when Phil was seated by his side, "which needs much thought. Usually, as you may have heard, our tribes are left in peace except by Man, who, seeing that we are so like himself, is ever ready to kill or wound us. Seldom, however, does he penetrate so far into the jungle, and for years our young ones have been unmolested; even such beasts as the leopard and the panther know that when once aroused our wrath is to be feared. Now—" he looked round solemnly, and the baby chimpanzees, locked in their mothers' arms, hid their faces on the hairy shoulders that were to them such temples of refuge—"now this is altered.

An Unloved King

A king of Leopards, cunning and furious beyond his kind, prowls round by night and seeks to surprise one of our number sleeping, so that at last he may boast that he has slain a chimpanzee. We live in companies, but it sometimes happens that our young males wander far through the jungle, and are surprised by night before they can rejoin us. It is one of these the leopard seeks."

The mother of Kamba, who had her hair neatly parted down the centre of her head, instead of wearing it in an upright crest as the others did, put her paw upon Prince Chim's shoulder.

"It's much too hot to talk just now," she said, fanning herself with the broad leaf in her other hand. "Wait till to-night, and call a conclave."

Prince Chim considered; it was good advice.

"It shall be so," he said gravely, and from the excitement of the younger members of the troop Phil guessed there would be special interest in this.

Kamba now invited Phil to come for a walk. He was anxious to show the beauties of his home,

In Nature's School

and pressed upon him the choicest fruits and berries. Phil tasted Kola nuts for the first time, and liked their curious flavour. He slacked his thirst at a stream half hidden by heavy trails of splendid cactus flowers, and wondered if Aleppo had come to his journey's end. The sound of much rustling in the leaves drew Kamba's attention, and he pointed to a low bush, out of which waddled a porcupine, evidently in a great hurry to go home to bed, just as the Urson had been.

He was very different to look at, for his whole armoury of pointed spears was lavishly displayed, and except about his head and the upper parts of his body, he seemed to have no hair. Kamba did not attempt to touch him.

"He killed a leopard once," he said, looking after him enviously as the porcupine made his way to the deep burrow he had scraped out for himself amongst the roots of a cotton tree. "The leopard was young and hungry, and foolish enough to think that a porcupine could be scrunched up, quills and

An Unloved King

all. But this little fellow defended himself fiercely, and managed to dig some of his sharp quills into the leopard's ear. One reached his brain, and King Gorilla found him dead next morning, and danced upon his head."

"What a fearful beast that Gorilla is!" remarked Phil, taking a look round to make sure he was nowhere near.

Kamba looked round too.

"Sometimes we think," he said, "that he is possessed by an evil spirit. There is a legend amongst us which says that although never of a gay disposition, the Gorilla was well content with his lot until, wandering down to the coastline, he first saw Man, when envy took possession of him and madness filled his breast. It is his fearful temper that makes him hated; in spite of his fierce strength, he attacks nothing that he does not need for food, when he is calm. Still, he is shunned by all, and even his young ones, whom he keeps always with him until they are quite grown up, are sullen and morose. I

In Nature's School

have never yet seen gorillas at play, and although when very young they cling to their mothers, they show little affection for them afterwards."

"Where are we going?" asked Phil, as the undergrowth became still more tangled, and the creeping plants that climbed round every trunk tripped him up with their twisted stems. No sun could shine through here; it was like dusk, and an evil little scorpion glared at them through the semi-darkness.

"These are the haunts of the Python," Kamba whispered mysteriously. "Watch! you will see him climb that tree after the birds."

During the last hour the jungle had become more silent. It was ten o'clock, and the hottest part of the day; the creatures of the night had long gone back to their holes, and the birds were dozing now in their nests or amongst the branches. A huge Python, his black coils glistening and his eyes red points of fire, glided out from beneath a low bush and coiled himself round the trunk of a slender

An Unloved King

tree. Pushing his head forward, he grasped a bough, and lifting himself from one branch to another he approached so near to a large grey parrot that she was almost in his jaws. Phil tried to call, but not a sound came from his lips. Her doom was almost sealed when, warned by some instinct that danger was near, she fluttered out of the Python's reach at the last moment.

Phil drew a breath of relief.

"I don't want to see any more of him," he said to Kamba, who had looked on almost indifferently. Chimpanzees are not averse to making a meal off birds themselves, as Phil learnt afterwards; though whilst he was with them he saw nothing of this.

"I think we'll rest for a few hours, until it grows cooler," Kamba remarked when they had put a safe distance between themselves and the Python. With one arm round Phil and the other supporting his own weight, he settled himself comfortably in a banana tree, and closed his eyes.

"Now let us think," he said.

Chapter the Thirteenth

"A Friend in the Jungle"



HIL was not even drowsy. On every side of him was something new and strange, and he was eager to watch the enormous black spider with very long legs and a fat body, the size of a small mouse, that had suddenly popped out from a little door in the ground, immediately under the banana tree. She had long fangs armed with sharp hooks, and looked very ferocious as she ran violently backward and forward in search of something that she might devour. A swarm of black ants, out on the same errand, fled quickly before her; and as she swallowed two that had lingered behind to finish a duel, Phil was glad that she was down on the

A Friend in the Jungle

ground instead of amongst the branches of the banana tree.

After a short time she reappeared from behind a large stone with a more satisfied expression, and proceeded to open her trap door. Slipping very quietly from Kamba's encircling arm, Phil bent cautiously forward, trying to see what was inside it.

"Come and have a look!" she cried, perceiving him; and Phil, who had suddenly grown quite small, mustered up all his courage and jumped down after her.

He was in a long tubular hole, lined with pure white silk, behind which, the Trap-door Spider told him proudly, was an inner lining of a coarser fabric, like tapestry.

"My house is my castle," she said, "and I like everything dainty about me. See how exquisitely I have fashioned my front door! It is made of several layers of earth cemented together by silken threads, and is balanced so that when opened it shuts by

In Nature's School

its own weight. Look at the perfect hinge I made for it, and the little holes opposite, in which I hook my claws and hold down the door if an animal attempts to get in from the outside."

Phil looked at all she pointed out to him, and agreed with her that she had fashioned her house well.

"Do you live here alone?" he asked.

"I am a widow," she answered shortly. "My mate was not—sufficiently respectful. He was plump, too, and smaller than I. And insects were scarce in the rains."

Phil shrank away from her in disgust. So she had actually eaten the poor spider who had been bold enough to take her for his mate! Phil had heard of such things, but never quite believed them until now.

"It was much happier for him," said the spider placidly. "We were quite unsuited to each other. Now, I wonder what *that* is?"

"That" was a gentle scratching on the lid of

A Friend in the Jungle

her trap door. Madame Spider flew to the tiny hole, stuck in her claws, and hung on for dear life.

"I only wanted to say, 'Good afternoon,'" said a mischievous voice, which Phil recognized as that of White-Nose.

"Those Monkeys again!" groaned the Trap-Door Spider in a whisper. "They never let me alone when I am above ground, but this is the first time that one has ever come near my home. I suppose he knows that you are here, and thinks you'll help him. Do, if you dare!"

Phil sat at the far end of the hole, which was fully two feet deep, and wished himself back in Kamba's protecting arms. When the Monkey grew tired of chattering to the empty air, and departed, Madame Spider apologized for her temper. Judging from the glimpse of it that Phil had seen, he was inclined to think that perhaps after all it had been better for her mate that he had died.

Like a guest who feels that he has overstayed his welcome, Phil was very anxious to depart.

In Nature's School

Madame Spider allowed him to go reluctantly; she knew that she could not hurt him, but it was a terrible wrench to her to part with anything so plump as he. She accompanied him to her front door, murmuring many regrets that he could not stay, and saying such pretty things that Phil felt he might have wronged her. Her attention was suddenly diverted to two enormous cockroaches, who were so absorbed in each other that they did not see her until she was close upon them. They then stopped abruptly, and the larger of the two waved his antennæ in fierce defiance. The smaller cockroach scuttled away—she was a coward, Phil thought indignantly—and the Spider advanced with stealthy tread. The cockroach glared at her; he trembled with rage, and crouched in a way that fully exposed the sharp spines on his legs. For several seconds they both stood motionless; then there was a rush and a scuffle, and, like a tiger springing upon his prey, the Trap-Door Spider darted upon her foe.

A Friend in the Jungle

The Cockroach closed his wings; she seized him under the throat and overpowered him. . . . Phil heard her sharp fangs cutting through his horny skin, and looked round for Kamba.

Kamba had gone. He had awakened from his doze soon after Phil had left him, and, never dreaming that he was with the Spider, had gone to look for him further on.

"It is something, anyhow, to be safely out of that Spider's den," said Phil, determining to ask some more amiable creature the way to Prince Chim's Baobab Palace. He had not gone far when he was rejoiced to see the funny little face of White-Nose peeping at him from a gorgeous cluster of orchids.

"Kamba's in a great way," said the monkey. "He thinks you are lost in the jungle, and may meet a scorpion and be alarmed!"

"A Scorpion couldn't be worse than a Trap-Door Spider," said Phil, who, although he was now his own size again, still shuddered to think of her cruel eyes.

In Nature's School

“Couldn’t he!” laughed White-Nose. “Why, even WE are afraid of him, and we *eat* spiders when we can’t get anything better. In some countries people are thankful enough to get a Trap-Door Spider to live in their gardens, for they clear out all the insects. A Scorpion lives just here. I’ll call him out, and then you’ll see what he is like.”

Holding his hands so that they formed a little cup, the monkey scooped out some water that still remained in a sheltered hollow between two branches of the banana tree, and carefully poured it into the entrance to the scorpion’s burrow, which was shaped in the half circle his claws formed when they were at work upon it. He had hardly done so when a furious creature, something like a spider, with lobster-like claws and a sharply pointed tail extending over his head, rushed angrily out, snapping wildly at everything in his way. When he saw Phil he stopped a moment; then crept up threateningly.

A Friend in the Jungle

“You had better not touch him!” called White-Nose from the banana tree; and with a look that was even more fierce than that of the Trap-Door Spider, the Scorpion retreated to his burrow.

“That crooked sting of his can kill the largest animal,” said the monkey soberly, clambering down again. “Near its tip, which is at the end of his tail, are two or three small holes, through which he shoots his venom. Ugh! It’s best to keep out of his way.”

Phil thought so too, and took great care also not to become entangled in the web of a beautiful yellow spotted spider. This web was fully a yard in width, and hung straight down between two trees, suspended by silken lines as coarse as thread. All kinds of insects, the monkey told him, were caught on this, and sometimes tiny birds.

Phil was still thinking of spiders when he saw a lone male gorilla amongst the vines. He looked desperately sullen, but less ill-tempered than the one that Phil had watched in the early morning.

In Nature's School

"I'm going to speak to him!" he said, and White-Nose vanished.

The jungle was astir again by now, for although it was quite early in the afternoon, the sun was getting low in the western sky. Two more gorillas came into view as Phil went to meet the first—a mother with her young one, which she carried on her back. On seeing the male gorilla she sat down suddenly, watched him a moment, and then retreated into the undergrowth as silently as she had come. Evidently she did not want to make his acquaintance, or knew him too well.

"Good afternoon," said Phil, as the gorilla sniffed at a tendril of the vine before he put it into his mouth.

The gorilla grunted.

"Have you paid a visit to the king?" he demanded roughly.

"I saw him for a moment early this morning, and I *heard* him a long while afterwards," said Phil, with meaning.

A Friend in the Jungle

"It is great impertinence for you to roam through our jungle without having paid your respects to him," roared the gorilla, flaring up in a moment. Relieving himself by two or three loud shrieks, which were answered from a distance by others as piercing, he stood upright, and beat his breast, chanting a dirge-like song in some strange language Phil could not understand.

"Follow me," he commanded, turning suddenly on his heel; and Phil, making himself as tall as he could, walked after him obediently until they reached the Gorilla's Court.

A very different scene met his eyes from that which he had witnessed in the morning. Seated in state upon an oozing bank sat King Gorilla, his wives around him. The injured Queen had evidently been restored to favour, for she sat at his right hand. A young gorilla, trembling in every limb, was arraigned before him; he had been detected in the act of rifling a fruit tree that his Majesty regarded as his special property, Phil learnt this

In Nature's School

through the angry voices of his accusers, who were naturally indignant. For the rights of property are strictly regarded among the Lords of the Jungle; no Gorilla or Chimpanzee with any respect for himself would dream either of robbing his neighbour or allowing himself to be robbed.

“We command that he be thoroughly beaten, and banished for ever from the peaceful swamps of the jungle, to end his days by the haunts of our enemy, MAN!” thundered the King. The first part of the sentence was carried out at once, and the unfortunate gorilla was dragged away by a group of the strongest males, who seemed to find much pleasure in his yells.

When this was over, and his shrieks grew fainter, the Gorilla King looked round at Phil. His scowl was horrible, but he tried to subdue it as best he could. Nature had commanded that Phil should be treated as an honoured guest, and even he dare not outwardly disobey. So he rose from his dank grass throne and curtly invited Phil to walk

A Friend in the Jungle

beside him. Phil noticed that in attempting to stand erect he did not stoop so much as Kamba, for his arms were longer, and he could thus more easily steady himself by these. He remarked, too, that he rested the black palms of his hands flat on the ground, while Kamba used his knuckles, for he could not hold his hand out straight as gorillas do.

Phil tried his hardest to think of something to say as they strolled along, for he knew that it was very bad manners to appear dull in his host's company. The Gorilla did not give him much help; he grunted "yes" or "no" indifferently to every question, sighing and groaning, and beating his breast from time to time as if he were sick of himself and all the world. When at last Phil induced him to talk a little, he did it with a very bad grace.

Gorillas lived in family groups, he told him morosely, not in communities like chimpanzees, "who loved the sound of their own voices far too well." The females were inclined to spoil their young, but he, the King, was there to see to that.

In Nature's School

His will was law, and no one dare gainsay it.

"The Elders talk, but I never listen," he added grimly, as he spoke of the "councils" that he held on special occasions. "I do as I like, and care for nobody. Might is right."

"Why do you yell so loudly in the early mornings?" Phil ventured to inquire.

"Ask Nature," returned the Gorilla bitterly. "Perhaps she knows—we don't. What right has she to make chimpanzees more like to Man than us, who are stronger than they, and far more terrible? Their teeth are not like tusks, as ours are, and they have no bony crests upon their skulls to mark them out as belonging to the Apes. Look at the thumbs, too, on my hinder feet—many a native lad in days gone by, who ventured unknowingly beneath the tree in which I hid, have I slain by catching his throat with these and squeezing his life out. Yet I would give my thumbs up willingly could I have feet like yours!"

He looked at Phil's pink toes with so much envy

A Friend in the Jungle

that his small companion was glad to sink them in the damp moss on which they trod. The Gorilla noticed his action, and his face was contorted into an ugly sneer.

"Where do you stay in the night time?" he demanded, as if struck by a new thought.

"With the Chimpanzees," Phil answered. "They're very kind and friendly. I like Prince Chim, and, except for my dear beavers, I am fonder of Kamba than any other animal I have met."

He was not prepared for the effect of his words. Bounding forward as if he had been struck, the Gorilla fell into a paroxysm of rage, and such a volume of sound poured from his deep chest that Phil thought it must surely be rent in two. Roar after roar echoed like thunder through the forest; the chattering monkeys fled to a safer distance, and birds dashed out of their nests in a panic of alarm.

It seemed long to Phil before the uproar subsided and there was silence again. The Gorilla had

In Nature's School

thrown himself on the ground, and the size of his huge body struck Phil afresh.

“If I had my way,” muttered the King, raising himself slowly, “I would kill every animal in the jungle. Then at last should I be at peace, for there would be none left for me to hate.”

After this there was quiet for a time. With sullen languor the Gorilla King led Phil towards the innermost depths of the jungle, forcing his way in the semi-twilight—for deep in the jungle it is always dusk—through thorn and thicket, and the serpent-like trails of creeper that would have barred his way. Strange creatures, yet unnamed by man, gazed at Phil furtively from behind the bushes; spiders and crawling reptiles, horrible to behold, thronged round his pathway, and above all rose the mist of the poisonous miasma that was as the breath of life to the Gorilla King.

The beautiful gold-winged bird that Phil when he first came had fancied must be a fairy princess with an emerald necklace, was disturbed by their

A Friend in the Jungle

approach, and darted out from an Eucalyptus tree. With one swift movement of his long arm the Gorilla clutched her; another second, and he tossed aside a mass of burnished feathers, draggled and limp, while a grin of fiendish pleasure lit up his gloomy eyes.

It faded suddenly. A sound so slight as to be quite unheard by Phil had fallen on his ears. His body stiffened, and the tufts of hair above his lowering brows erected themselves fiercely. His features twitched; Phil feared another outburst, and looked in vain to see what had aroused him.

Someone was treading the swampy ground. The Gorilla King rushed forward, crashing through the branches in his mad haste, and making for the natural gap in the undergrowth whence the sound had come. Phil stood transfixed with horror, for a young white-helmeted hunter, little more indeed than a boy, was treading the tangled jungle with the calm assurance of one who was accustomed to roam through an English wood.

In Nature's School

Baleful green fires shot from the Gorilla's eyes, and with a roar more awful than any that Phil had heard from him yet, he sprang across the open space, where the young hunter, too startled to swerve aside, faced him undauntedly. Snatching the rifle from his hands, the Gorilla broke it in two as if it had been dry tinder; then turned to tear its owner limb from limb.

That moment's pause to break the rifle, brief as it was, meant death to the mighty king, for a second hunter followed in the wake of the first, and a quick glance showed him the peril of his young companion. The same instant his rifle rang out and the shot went straight to the great beast's heart.

With his hideous lips still twisted in an exultant cry of rage, and tusk-like fangs bared ready to bury in his victim's flesh, the Gorilla fell to earth with a convulsive shudder. He was quite dead. A ghoullike spider sprang out of his lair, and crept beneath the hollow of his back.

A Friend in the Jungle

The hunters looked at each other without speaking.

"It is well to have a friend in the jungle," said the young one at last. The other's face was as white as his helmet. He touched the prostrate form with the tip of his boot.

"We'll take his skin back, anyhow," he said.

The hunters set about their task, and Phil hurried away, trying to throw off the loneliness that oppressed him. Evil-eyed scorpions glared at him fiercely, but dared not venture near. A huge black panther, twisting his sinuous body through a mass of thorn trees, crouched low as if to spring, while giant Anacondas, twining round the distorted branches of great trees, writhed their shining folds as if they longed to crush him. It was like a nightmare, and in spite of himself Phil almost screamed aloud.

Then, in a single instant, all was changed. Kamba, his friend, was hastening towards him through the trees, a dread that he would not acknowledge lurk-

In Nature's School

ing in his troubled eyes. When he saw Phil he greeted him with the greatest joy.

“At last!” he cried. “I have been searching for you for hours. Why did you stay so long away? I have been sad and anxious.”

He listened gravely while Phil told him what had happened.

“So the white hunters have found their way here,” he said. “I do not think that they will linger. For them these mists are poisonous, and fever lurks in every bush. . . . You are quite sure that the Gorilla King was killed? It may have been that he was but shamming death, that his foes might come near, and die together. It would be like him.”

But Phil was quite sure that the Gorilla King could harm no one now. Already the news was winging its way through the jungle; there were none to bewail his untimely end, save his own kindred, and even they did not seem much disturbed. To them, as to all other living things, he had been fierce and cruel.

A Friend in the Jungle

“His son will reign in his stead, and keep his family together,” Kamba remarked, as he and Phil swung themselves from branch to branch, preferring that method of travelling to treading the spongy swamp beneath. “There is but little to choose between him and his father, I am sorry to say, for all gorillas are much alike. The best way to deal with such savage creatures is to leave them alone. They have given way so often to their temper and jealousy, that now it is their very nature to sulk. You never sulk, I hope,” he added, stopping to give Phil an affectionate hug. “It’s a dreadful habit, and grows on one quite soon. And there’s something so mean and small about it—a sulky animal is detested everywhere, and no one can find a good word to say for him.”

Phil glanced away to call a beautiful little Kendro—a tiny squirrel said to be the smallest in the world—and then showed Kamba a very pink face, and honest grey eyes that looked merry as well as ashamed.

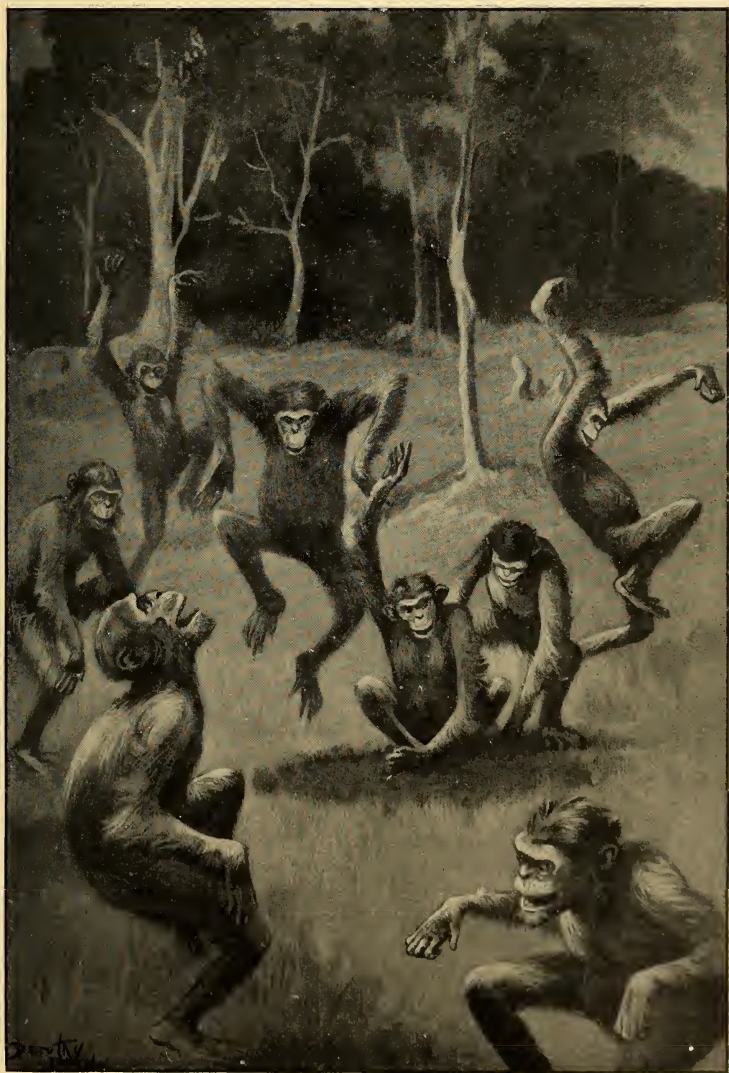
In Nature's School

"P'raps I did sulk a little at school," he said, "and I s'pose that that was why they teased me so—that, and because I was afraid. I shan't be now. What did you say we were going to do to-night?"

"There's the Carnival first, and then the Conclave," Kamba said briskly. "Come along. The sun will be setting soon, and then it will grow dark almost at once."

He made his way in a straight line to the great baobab tree in which Phil had first seen Prince Chim. Beyond the shelter of its branches was a small irregular patch of ground, some two feet wide, covered with a thin surface of hardened clay. Kamba's own finger marks ran across it, as if he had patted it down while it was still wet and plastic.

"We brought that clay from the river bank where the lilies grow," he said, wrinkling up his nose in a triumphant grin until it almost disappeared under his prominent eyebrows. "We spread it over a kind of peat, which is very porous, and it makes us a splendid drum. Listen!"



The wildest Antics

A Friend in the Jungle

He struck the queer drum quickly, first with one hand and then with the other, moving his arms in rapid succession, and swinging them from side to side; the hollow sound, though dull in tone, was loud enough to startle all the creatures of the jungle. It was the signal for the rest of the company to break into the wildest antics; it really looked, Phil thought, as if they had all gone mad. They jumped and danced like goblins in a nightmare, swinging their bodies in a rude rhythm, and lifting up their voices in high rolling notes as if they were trying to sing. The louder Kamba pounded the drum, the more violent their movements became. When Kamba grew tired, another took his place; it seemed to be a post of honour, and was yielded in turn to all the young males who crowded round.

Kamba's dancing was more weird than any. He bowed and swayed and twisted himself into the strangest contortions, turning up his eyes as if inspired. Phil spoke to him once,

In Nature's School

but he did not hear him. His mind was far away.

The Carnival must have gone on for hours, when a sudden wind stirred through the leaves of the primeval forest. A distant roar, more full of menace than any sound that can proceed from brute or human lips, rolled up from the West; all living creatures in the jungle heard it, and knew the storm was coming. The thunder grew louder; it was nearer now, and the birds hid themselves under the thickest leaves. Then the rain swirled down in streams and torrents, dashing through the jungle greenery like a tidal wave sweeping all before it in its headlong course.

The Champanzees rushed for shelter to the great baobab tree; and amongst its branches, with thunder still roaring all around, and zig-zag flashes of lightning darting through the sky, they held their Conclave when the rain had ceased.

Chapter the Fourteenth

“The White Queen”



HE storm had passed. The scent of lilies from the neighbouring river was borne on the rain-cleansed air, and a silver-throated bird voiced a soft thanksgiving

that her nest had not been swept away. Prince Chim was looking very grave. After a long discussion they were no nearer a decision respecting their enemy, the Leopard; and the Princess, banished with her ladies to the upper boughs, looked down disdainfully with curling lips. Even the giant Baobab tree had not altogether protected her from the rain, and as she shook the last drops from her parted hair she expressed her contempt for the company beneath in audible tones.

In Nature's School

“The Prince has been talking for hours; yet all he can say is that we must ‘act together’—as if we ever did anything else!” she remarked to Phil, who had been sitting beside her for some time. “Why doesn’t he plan to take the Leopard by surprise?”

Prince Chim, as he paused for breath, caught her words distinctly. With a perfectly impassive face he took up her idea as if it had been his own.

“Let us meet guile by guile,” he said, “and take the Leopard by surprise. One of our young ones shall lay himself at the foot of a tree some distance from our usual haunts, and feign sleep. A band of our strongest males will hide themselves in the bushes close at hand. Kamba, my son, shall head them; when the Leopard draws near they will fall upon him, and the wild beasts of the jungle will learn what happens to those who dare to touch a Chimpanzee.”

The end of his speech was drowned with shouts of approval, and the Princess, quite satisfied now, applauded as loudly as any of them.

The White Queen

"That is always the way," she confided to Phil. "I put things into his head, and he gets all the credit."

The Carnival, the Conclave, or the storm—perhaps all three—seemed to have exhausted the energy of Kamba. He was very dull next morning and let Phil wander off alone while he settled himself in a banana tree, so that he could eat or sleep at his pleasure.

"Go and see the Termites," he murmured drowsily, "if you want to meet industrious creatures. I'm lazy to-day. The Banded Mungous will take you if you ask her. I must rest for to-night, that I may have the strength of ten. The leopard has eyes that burn, and his teeth are swords."

Phil easily found the Banded Mungous. He was guided to her by the sound of her chattering, and the queer little croaks which seemed to be her expressions of satisfaction. She was a small animal about the size of the Lady Ondatra, and her grizzled fur was tastefully decorated with bands of

In Nature's School

a darker colour. Her eyes were amber and very brilliant, and she had a dear little pointed nose that looked as if it were made to be poked into everyone's business. Her movements were as quick as Feather-tail's, as she ran gaily down the branches of a tree when she saw Phil coming.

"Kamba said that I would take you to see the Termites?" she exclaimed. "How like a male thing! I suppose he thought I had nothing to do, and such a hot day, too!"

Phil's face fell. He had heard so much about the Termites, and wanted particularly to see their home. The Mungous relented at once when she noticed his disappointment.

"Of course I'll take you, dear boy!" she cried. "Any friend of Nature's is a friend of mine. The question is, how? For you are certainly too large for me to carry."

"Not at all," said Phil, as he felt himself shrinking rapidly. The Mungous looked at him with mild surprise.

The White Queen

“Ex-tra-ordinary!” she cried, “and how convenient! I can do something in that line myself, as you may see. Jump on my back, and off we’ll go.”

Before Phil had time to do this a long black snake wriggled out of a hollow tree, where he had just swallowed a small bird. He glanced at the Mungous, and made as if to glide away. But she was too quick for him. With a sudden pounce she sprang at the back of his head with a scream of anger, puffing out her small body until it was nearly twice as large as it should be. The snake, surprised, put out his poisoned fangs, which the Mungous eluded by jumping from side to side, giving him sharp bites whenever she could reach him. Enraged at her pertinacity, he coiled his folds around her, when she at once shrank back to her usual size and slipped away between them. Darting at his throat, she made her sharp teeth meet, until the sinuous folds relaxed and he was dead. The Mungous dragged his still writhing body out of the path, as if she were very well pleased with herself.

In Nature's School

"I've had my eye on him for some time," she said, as Phil perched behind her. "The number of birds these reptiles eat is shocking. They don't leave any for honest families."

Phil thought it best not to ask her what a Mungous lived on, and gave himself up to enjoying his novel ride. His fiery steed ran on at a great pace, diving under creepers and bushes until the roughness of Phil's hair would have horrified any Matron, however kind. Her little feet pattered on and on; a white-faced pig looked at her with sour disapproval, and a hedgehog, over which she had scrambled before she saw him, asked her crossly who was after her.

"The Wind!" she cried; and did not stop until she reached the edge of the jungle. Here she paused to sniff.

"I really believe I can smell the sea," she said, "though it would take us days to get there. Do you see that dome-shaped citadel on the plain? That is the Termites' nest, so you'll soon be there."

The White Queen

Within a short distance of the great clay-built structure, which was certainly more than six feet high, she nodded and left him. Phil, growing smaller and smaller still, until a blade of grass seemed taller to him than a lamp-post would be in an ordinary way, looked round for some door to knock at, but could see none. So he sat himself down under the welcome shade of a small green leaf, and there waited patiently, staring at the white citadel in front of him with all his might.

While he watched it a strange thing happened. An animal encased in sharp and keen-edged horny plates, overlying each other from the beginning of his head to the tip of his tail, crawled languidly along the plain. He was quite five feet in length, but more than half of this was his spiky tail, which tapered off from his body without any definite beginning. His tiny head was thin and pointed, and his eyes glittered like diamonds as he surveyed the Ant hill thoughtfully, wondering to find himself there at such an unusual hour of the day. Presently

In Nature's School

he gave his tail a gentle shake, and delicately extended a short and powerful foreleg, armed with a huge claw, with which he struck the Citadel wall. Encouraged by a slight crumbling of the clay, he set to work with more energy, digging his claws into the strong wall with a force of which Phil had not thought him capable. Some sound that was inaudible to Phil made him suddenly desist; he seemed to listen, then rolled himself up into a ball, tucking his head between his paws, just as the Urson did. His sharp scales pointed outwards, and made a strong defence against the enemy. Hearing nothing further, he uncurled himself, and proceeded methodically with his work.

A little black beetle, now quite a giant to Phil, was watching him too from a spear of grass.

"He's the Long-tailed Manis," he said, mouthing his words as if he liked the sound of them, "and belongs to the illustrious family of the Anteaters, the Armadillos, and the Duckbills, all famous, I believe, in natural history. The White Ants, or

The White Queen

Termites, are his favourite food, and he'll go to any trouble to get them. The clay walls of their citadel are very thick, but his claws will be through in another moment."

"Where does he live?" asked Phil.

"In a burrow he digs for himself, where he is safe from everyone. He usually sleeps until the evening, but I suppose that the storm kept him at home last night, and that now he is hungry. There! he has done it at last. The sentinel ants have given the alarm, and you'll see the soldiers pouring out of the breach in their thousands."

It was as he had said. Two or three Termites first appeared, as if to find out what had happened; they returned to the fortress to bear the news, and almost immediately myriads of enraged "soldiers," tumbling over each other in their eagerness to be first, poured out of the hole.

"Those are the 'soldier' ants, and quite blind," murmured the beetle, "so they can only feel their way. If the Long-tailed Manis were not so well

In Nature's School

protected by his suit of mail, he would not dare to storm their castle. They are fierce as lions, and draw their own weight in blood from any animal on which they fasten."

The savage little creatures met with scant mercy from the Manis. Darting out his long, snake-like tongue, which was covered, Phil could see, with some gummy substance, he licked them in by hundreds, with every sign of keen enjoyment. "The more the merrier" his diamond eyes declared, when a repetition of the sound that had first startled him turned his pleasure to alarm.

"What is it? Can you hear?" Phil asked the Beetle, as the Manis, with one more hasty lick at the swarming ants, made away as fast as his legs could carry him, which seemed very slow to Phil.

"It was the distant shout of a native," said the Beetle, listening intently, "but I don't think he is coming this way. Watch, now, and you will see the soldiers go back into the fortress and the labourers coming to repair the damage."

The White Queen

“‘Soldiers,’ and ‘labourers,’” said Phil. “How queer it sounds when you’re speaking of ants!”

“Insects have much more skill and intelligence than you seem to think,” said the Beetle rather huffily. “I could tell you things in my own family that would perhaps surprise you more. There are the labourers—they haven’t lost much time.”

Moving closer to the Ant hill, Phil looked on with amazement as crowds of ants, much smaller than the soldiers, and able to see, hastened from every direction towards the breach in the wall, each bearing a load of mortar, which he placed on the edge of the damaged portion, and then went off for more.

It was marvellous to see in what perfect order everything was done, without either hurry or confusion; each ant kept to the tiny space on which he was working, though he had constantly to pass and re-pass his fellow labourers to fetch more clay. The Beetle, pacified by Phil’s admiration, advised him to make himself known to one of the Termites, as

In Nature's School

the inside of the Citadel was more wonderful still.

Just at this moment Phil had rather a narrow escape. One of the labourers, mistaking him for an ant belonging to a species with which the Termites were at war, hastily summoned a soldier, who rushed at him with open mouth and nearly fixed his fangs into his throat. He seemed almost sorry when he found out his mistake, for after the conduct of the Manis he was longing for a fight.

“I suppose I must take you round,” he remarked grudgingly, “though it isn’t a soldier’s duty. But of course, if Nature sent you—?”

“She did,” said Phil very firmly; and the soldier led him down one of the many subterranean passages, beautifully lined with clay, and often nearly a foot across, that ran in a sloping direction from the foot of the Ant hill three or four feet down into the earth. With even more twists and turns than the galleries in the Hackees’ burrow, these were carried upward again, and at the entrance to the fortress were connected with an amazing number of galleries

The White Queen

which wound round the whole building up to the top. The upper part, his guide told Phil, was principally built for the sake of keeping the lower portion sufficiently warm and moist for the eggs and larvæ.

Phil's importance was greatly increased in the soldier's eyes when they were met in the entrance by a messenger from the Termite Queen, commanding his attendance in the Royal apartment.

This was built on the ground floor, in the very centre of the Ant hill, and was surrounded by elaborate cells and galleries, which were used as nurseries and store rooms. Here the White Queen lived with her consort, practically a prisoner, since her extraordinary habit of growing larger every day made it impossible for her to get through the door. The Royal apartment was constantly being enlarged by her devoted subjects, who found it all that they could do to keep pace with her.

Her Majesty received Phil graciously, and congratulated him on being Nature's guest.

"Nature has done a great deal for us," she said,

In Nature's School

“and we are grateful to her. I should say that Ants have more brains in proportion to their size than any other living creature.”

She did not seem very much attached to her consort, who was smaller than she and rather pensive.

“In a very short time,” she said, looking at him with disapproval, “that Ant will die, and I shall then have nothing to distract my attention from growing. When I have attained my full size—that is, when I am as large as thirty thousand of my labourers rolled into one—I shall start laying my eggs, at the rate of fifty or sixty a minute, working steadily at this, both night and day, for two full years.

“As soon as my eggs are laid, my attendants will carry them off to the nurseries, where they will be kept at the right heat until they are hatched, and then fed and tended until they can look after themselves. Captain Bellicos will show you the nurseries after you have left me.”

“I think your soldiers are very brave,” said Phil, when the Captain had retired out of earshot.

The White Queen

“That goes without saying,” remarked the White Queen grandly. “I have one soldier to every hundred labourers. You will know them by their long sharp jaws and enormous heads, and by their courage. They think nothing of attacking a human being if he gets in their way, and are quite capable of driving him out of his home. Soldiers (neuters) are each as large as fifteen labourers (larvæ), while the perfect Termites, male and female, are twice the size of the soldiers. Captain Bellicos, take our visitor round the fortress, and offer him some refreshment.”

Phil thanked her gratefully as he withdrew, but as he happened to know that wood was the Termites' standard food, he did not think that he would take anything. He remembered hearing once how Termite ants attacked an oak door and left it hollow within a few hours, and that no woods except ironwood and ebony could resist their ravages.

Captain Bellicos showed him round, as he had been directed, and Phil was more and more sur-
269

In Nature's School

prised at the Termites' industry and skill as he saw the long, beautifully formed galleries and stately chambers.

"We obey orders, do our best, and love our work," said Captain Bellicos. His work was fighting, and even as he ushered Phil through the subterranean passages, he was planning a fresh attack upon some enemies.

The Banded Mungous had very kindly come back for Phil, and was poking about amongst the grass when he crept out. At first she did not recognise him; when she did, she watched him growing larger with envious eyes.

"What wouldn't I give to be able to do that," she sighed. "Stay as you are now—I'm rather tired, and don't want more to carry than I can help."

Kamba met him at the edge of the jungle and Phil noticed again how curiously he moved. He used his arms more as if they were crutches than limbs, and jerked himself forward in the oddest way. "Had a good time?" he inquired genially,

The White Queen

much refreshed after his idle day. "The young Gorilla King has been inquiring after you. You had better go round at once."

"I s'pose I'll have to go, as he is King of the jungle?" Phil said, with a deep sigh. But Kamba was only trying to tease, and Phil ran laughingly away from him to play with White-Nose again.

Darkness gathered over the forest before he knew. He was tired with play, and the great Baobab tree, beneath which he had meant to sleep that night, was quite a mile away. The venerable White-Nose invited him to spend the night with them.

"The Chimpanzees are on the war-path," he said, for all the monkeys were in the secret, "and Kamba is much too busy to think of you. If you stay with us you will be quite safe, and the night wind is sure to tell him where you are."

So Phil settled down between the baby White-Nose and a dear little sister of his called Katma. She made friends with him in the most charming way,

In Nature's School

and chattered artlessly, until the venerable White-Nose drily reminded her that there were other Monkeys in that tree as well as she.

Soon Katma herself was asleep. A night owl hooted, and the monotonous croak of the bull frogs sounded very dismal. Phil wished after all that he had gone back to the Chimpanzees; he would have slept much more comfortably on the ground, or perhaps Kamba might have let him go with him to watch for the Leopard.

No stars looked down to keep Phil company, though during the last night's storm a thunderbolt had made a gap in the trees through which he could see the sky. The darkness stifled him; he longed to cry out aloud, for with a new sense that seemed to have come to him since he had lived in the jungle, he felt there was some dreaded creature near.

Hark! What was that? The rustle of a leaf on the path that led from the haunts of the pythons. Another rustle—and yet another. Some animal

The White Queen

was creeping through the undergrowth with stealthy tread; now fiery eyes, suspended in the gloom, flamed into view; it was the Leopard.

Phil waited until the eyes had passed; then he swung himself from tree to tree as White-Nose had shown him, and followed the sound of the rustling leaves on the ground below. It was so faint at times that unless Father Beaver had taught him how to listen he would not have heard it; as it was, it guided him on until the undergrowth became less thick, and he and the stealthy creature he was following reached an open spot. Here the lightning had killed two forest giants, whose branches stretched out helplessly, living and green-leaved still.

The moon was shining now in the shrouded sky, and Phil could see the sleeping form of a Chimpanzee against one of the prostrate trunks. No other living thing seemed near, and Phil shuddered to think what would happen to the sleeper.

The Leopard's movements grew more snake-like; a quiver of longing passed over his lithe frame; his

In Nature's School

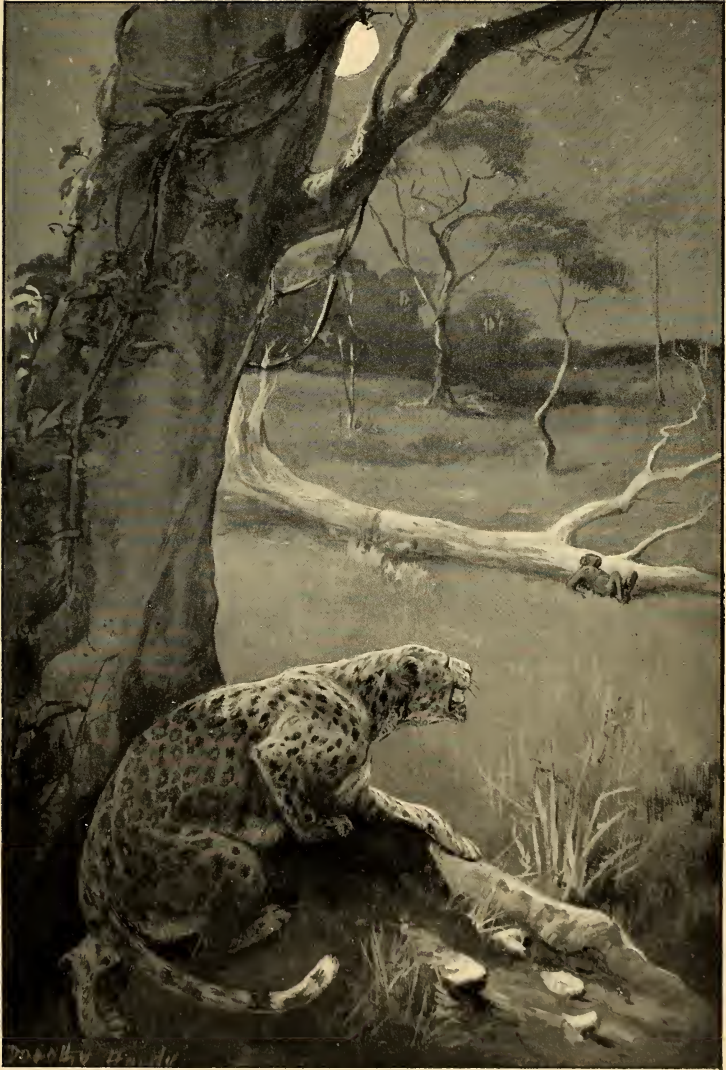
great lips parted and showed his teeth. Sweet to a Leopard's taste is the blood of a Chimpanzee, and great the honour amongst the Cat tribe that awaits his slayer.

There was still no sound but the Leopard's quick breathing. One leap, and the flesh of the Chimpanzee would be in his jaws.

But as he crouched to spring, a great cry rent the air. From under the prostrate branches, and over the clustering vines, swarmed hairy figures whose eyes were as vengeful, and hearts as fierce, even as his own.

The Leopard snarled, and began to move backwards to the shelter of the thick undergrowth. Too late; he was surrounded by howling Chimpanzees, and at their mercy.

Then ensued a scene which no eye could follow. The fierce animals became a snarling and tearing mass, which spun round, and over and over, like a whirlwind, for a few brief moments. The teeth and claws of the Leopard were of little use to him,



The Leopard

The White Queen

although they left savage marks upon many of his enemies. He was overwhelmed by sheer force of weight and numbers; and there was little to show what he had once been when the rage of the Chimpanzees had spent its force.

They left his skin beside the fallen trees.

"It will serve as a warning to his tribe," remarked Prince Chim, once more a polished old gentleman with pleasant manners. "To trap him so was a good thought. It was well planned."

The others applauded, and Chim looked pleased, as though all the credit belonged to him. The Princess, who had only appeared upon the scene when the battle was over, and was now, with all her Court, engaged in tending those who had suffered from the Leopard's claws, grinned at Phil as he helped to convey a wounded warrior to shelter. Kamba himself had escaped without a scratch, and seemed in very good spirits over the whole affair.

Chapter the Fifteenth

"The Other Side of the World"



HIL wondered to which land the night wind had brought him. She had come for him so silently the night before, as he slept beside Kamba under the great Baobab tree, that he had not felt her encircling arms, and was amazed this morning to find himself in a new country. The tangled undergrowth of the jungle had been very different from these grassy plains, that rippled away before him like an endless sea, and instead of the steaming heat that had sometimes stifled him, his lungs were filled with pure fresh air that was a delight to breathe.

In the scrub close by grew fragrant bushes of yellow blossoms that he had never seen before,

The Other Side

and white and purple bloomed beside it on a low bush, close to the drooping branches of a wild cherry, whose foliage was a soft, bright green, as though it were springtime still.

Yet it must be late in the autumn now, Phil knew, for he had heard from the night wind that in the woods at home the reddened leaves were falling from the trees, and that the swallows were already gathering high over fields of stubble, ready to start on their journey south.

A gentle sound came from the thin forest that bordered the scrub. The stately trees grew wide apart, with dew-tipped grass between, and on one of these, comfortably tucked between the hollow of two branches, was a funny creature like a little rough-coated bear, about the size of a small bull terrier. His fur was a delicate grey, touched here and there with reddish brown, and tufts of long and silky hair spread over his ears. He explained to Phil in tones like a plaintive bark that he was the Koala, or Australian bear.

In Nature's School

"Can you climb?" he called anxiously. "Ah! that's all right. I was afraid I should have to come down to you on the ground, and I don't feel at home there. My feet, you'll notice, are formed for climbing. I have two sets of toes on my fore-paws—two inner and three outer—and four toes and a strong thumb on each of my hind feet, which are most useful. I always live in trees. My favourite—is the—Eu—ca—lyptus—I——"

He yawned and yawned; curled himself up more tightly, and the next moment was fast asleep. Phil put his arm round his neck and shook him vigorously.

"You must talk to me!" he cried. "Yes—I know you're what they call 'a nocturnal animal' and sleep by day. But just for once it won't hurt you to miss your bedtime—I always wanted to at home."

"No," said the Koala tranquilly, "I don't suppose it will. I shall have another supper—that's all." And he started nibbling one of the broad

The Other Side

green leaves of the Eucalyptus, looking at Phil between-whiles with a comical expression of resigned good nature.

“The night wind told me to come this way,” he remarked presently, “for she wanted you to see me. I am rather a rare animal now, and seldom met with in this district. A year ago I was carried about in my mother’s pouch. When I first came out of it I clung to her back for a long time. But now I am independent, and it is grand to be able to stay on one gum tree as long as I like. Sometimes I don’t stir for days. It saves so much trouble!”

“I think you’re rather a lazy little fellow,” said Phil, pinching his muzzle, which was as soft as velvet.

“They sometimes call me the Australian sloth,” the Koala said with pensive pride. “But what is the use of hurrying when there is nothing to hurry for?”

He looked, as he spoke, like a furry ball, and

In Nature's School

the very picture of tranquil content. Phil was rather surprised when his soft hair bristled, and he gave vent to a series of loud cries, most remarkably like those of an angry cat when it meets a rival on a moonlight stroll. The Koala yelled for about three minutes, dashing himself against the tree in his fury, and frightening all the birds.

“Do tell me what it is all about!” urged Phil, when the exhausted little creature laid his head upon his shoulder like a baby, and panted for breath.

“I don’t really know,” murmured the Koala. “Something annoyed me—I forget now. Let’s go to sleep.”

Phil made several efforts to wake him, but found them useless. So he left him to his slumbers, and went back to the plains, where he stretched himself out on the thick grass and waited to see what would happen.

Very soon a big red Kangaroo lob-lobbed to-

The Other Side

wards him. Her white teeth gleamed through her cleft lips, but her soft full eyes gave her a very gentle expression. A broad white mark ran straight up her face from the angle of her mouth, and her woolly fur was tinged with red.

“We are very glad to see you,” she said briskly, and as he looked at her more closely Phil saw a small head protruding from her pouch. It belonged to her baby, a fine little fellow about his own size, and so exactly like his mother, except for the white mark across her face, that he might have been her in miniature.

“I’m going to play about in the scrub,” said the little Kangaroo gleefully to Phil, “while Mother shows you round. You’ll find that pouch of hers most comfortable—I did not leave it for months when I first came.”

He beamed at Phil in a friendly fashion, and gave him a sharp box on one side of his face with his short forepaw. Phil hit back as best he could, and the two had a wrestling match.

In Nature's School

"You're not bad at all," said the young Kangaroo, patting him on his shoulder. "Let me see how high you can jump. I shall beat you there."

But Mrs Kangaroo objected.

"No, Rufus," she said firmly, "he has something better to do just now than to romp with you. Remember what I have said—don't wander too far from the scrub, and if you see anything strange in the distance be off at once to shelter."

With a business-like air she caught Phil up with her forepaws, and tucked him into her pouch.

"You fit in nicely," she said with satisfaction, and made off with him over the plains, each bound covering a distance of several yards. In spite of this she touched the earth so lightly that Phil was never shaken. The Kangaroo talked all the time.

"That baby of mine is a fine little fellow, isn't he?" she remarked. ("Mothers are all alike," thought Phil.) "You would scarcely believe it, perhaps, but at birth he was scarcely an inch and a quarter in length, measuring from the tip of his nose

The Other Side

to the end of his tail, and as transparent as a scrap of white jelly. I put him into my pouch at once, and he lay there, warm and snug, for many months. He can feed himself now, as you would see if you watched him browsing under the trees, but he comes back to me still for a drink of milk, or if his little legs get tired. When springs and rivers dry up, as they often do here in Australia in times of drought, we have to travel long distances in search of water, and our young ones would never be able to keep up with us, or stand the fatigue of the journey. So Nature gave us our pouches in order that we may carry our babies wherever we go, with as little fatigue to ourselves as possible."

"Are there many kinds of Kangaroos?" asked Phil when she stopped for breath.

"At least fifty distinct species," she answered, waving the great tail which she used to balance herself when she sat down, when with her two hind legs it formed a kind of tripod.

"I belong to the Red Kangaroos, and, like all the

In Nature's School

females of our kind, am very much smaller than my husband. 'Boomers,' as some of the largest Kangaroo males are called, are taller than the tallest men when they stand erect to see the country. When they are chased by dogs they can run for fully twenty miles without the least effort. A Boomer is very brave, and a foe to be dreaded, for the long and pointed claws with which our hinder feet are armed can cut like knives, and they will rip open the body of a hound at a single blow."

"Hounds?" questioned Phil.

The Kangaroo stopped to look over a low hill; the pasture lands beyond it were covered with sheep, but no human being was in sight.

"Kangaroo hunting is a favourite sport in some parts of the country," she said with a deep sigh. "There is a special breed of hounds which men call 'Kangaroo dogs,' and these are trained to hunt us just as the fox is hunted in other countries. Well do I remember the first time that I ever saw them. My mate and I were browsing on some

The Other Side

sweet, spring grass when we heard the sound of a distant bark.

“The hounds!” he cried, springing to his full height; he was wiser than I, and knew that they were followed by men on horseback. He ordered me off to the bush at once, but not until he saw the number of those against him did he deign to flee himself. It was almost too late then, though his flying leaps covered a distance of many feet . . . They drove him to bay near Crystal Creek; the foremost hound was on him as he turned. Catching him by the throat, the Boomer leapt into the water, and with one of his great hind feet held him under the water until he was drowned. Another, and yet another, shared the same fate; then, when the rest held back, and dare not follow, he swam across the bay, a distance of fully a mile and a half, and gained the shelter of the hills. Ah! how proud I was when the night wind told me what he had done! Never a Boomer more brave than he. He met his fate a year ago; I mourn him still.”

In Nature's School

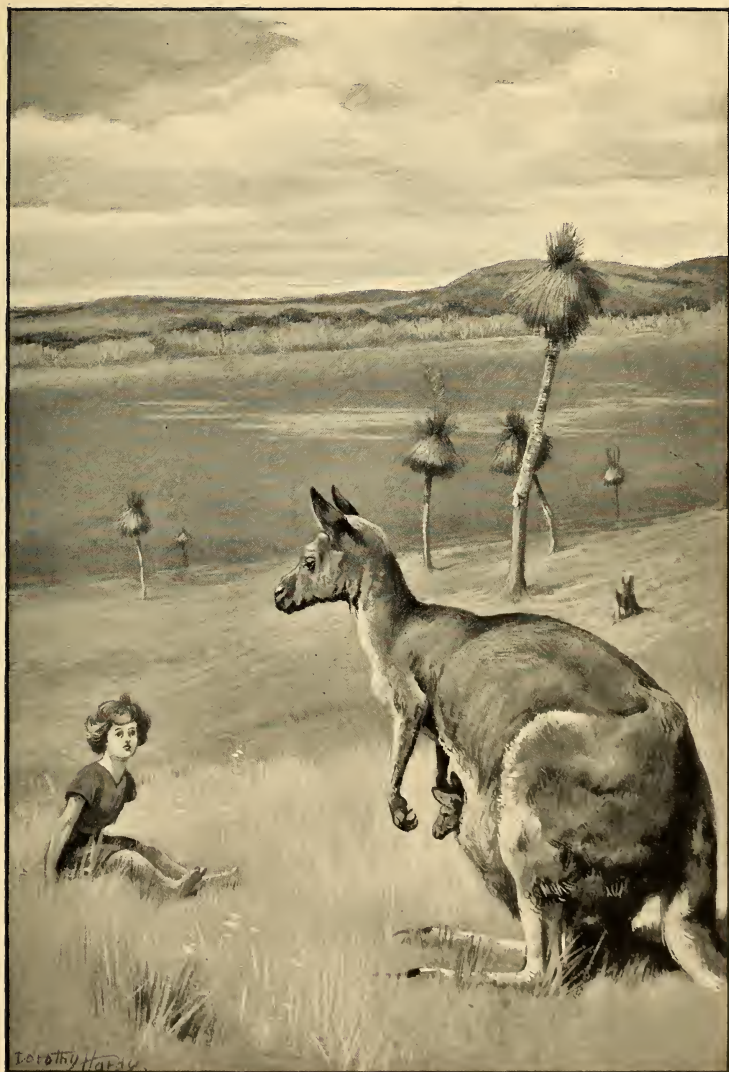
As the Red Kangaroo paused to recover from her emotion, another cherry tree in full blossom drew Phil's attention, and he wonderingly remarked that in England the cherry bloomed in Spring.

"Well, and it is Spring with us," said the Kangaroo, rather astonished that he did not know. "We are at the other side of the world, so the seasons are reversed. Christmas day is midsummer here, and your midsummer is our coldest time of the year."

"It is very strange," mused Phil.

"So are most things when you come to think of them," said his companion. "Just look at that Tree Kangaroo!"

They had reached a thin belt of forest trees by now, and down one of the tallest a glossy black Kangaroo was scampering with the ease of a Squirrel. As she heard voices she ran quickly up again and looked down at Phil from a tall branch with her very long black tail dangling beneath



Phil and the Kangaroo

The Other Side

her. Her forepaws were not nearly so short in proportion to her hind ones as were the Red Kangaroo's, and her broad nose was covered with sparse hairs.

"This is 'Mapi,'" said Mrs Kangaroo, with the air of a showman. "Observe her tail. She uses it principally as a balancing pole, and she can make it as stiff as a ramrod if she chooses. She camps entirely in the branches of trees, and goes to sleep with her head hanging on her breast between her forepaws. Creepers, ferns and fruit are what she lives on, and the natives think her flesh the greatest delicacy. They don't often get a chance of tasting it, I'm glad to say!"

Both Kangaroos chuckled; before Phil could ask the Mapi any questions, his steed was off again.

The next time she stopped it was to look at a Rat Kangaroo, a tiny lady about the size of the Ondatra. She was fast asleep in a nest so carefully hidden in the long grass that Phil could see no sign of her until the Red Kangaroo showed him

In Nature's School

where to look. She was chiefly remarkable, as his guide explained, for her very long tail, the tip of which she could curl at will in the same way that monkeys do.

"It is a great help to me," broke in the little thing. "When I was building my nest I made up a small bundle of dried grass every few minutes, twisted the tip of my tail round it, and hopped away home. All the materials I used for my nest I carried in this way."

The day was her bedtime, and she was too drowsy to get up and let Phil see her. Before they went on again the Kangaroo pointed out to him the entrance to a burrow within a stone's throw of her nest.

"The Wombat lives there," she said. "He is a clumsy looking animal, but quite amusing and harmless. He feeds on roots, and sleeps all day. If we woke him now he would only grunt; his burrow is very deep."

Phil was next introduced to a pair of Brush

The Other Side

Turkeys, who had built an enormous mound of decaying leaves and vegetable refuse as large as a hut, and many yards in width. This they had scraped together with their hind feet, which were extremely strong and armed with claws, and the hen had buried within it a number of eggs. These would soon be hatched by the heat of the decaying leaves. She seemed a very gay kind of mother, Phil thought, for she ran about chattering to anyone who would listen to her, while her mate waited gravely beside the mound, keeping open the hole that he had made in its centre, so that the eggs might not be hatched too quickly.

“When the shells crack and the young birds appear,” he said, “I shall see that they are carefully covered for the first twelve hours. The next day, when their wing feathers will be well developed, though still encased in a kind of sheath, I shall let them out. On the third day they will be ready to fly—and their mother must look after them then!”

In Nature's School

The poor Turkey appeared quite harassed with family cares; not so the Lyre bird, who came next on the list of curious creatures whose acquaintance the Kangaroo was anxious that Phil should make. His hen, plain and homely in dull brown feathers, was rather like a gigantic wren, but the fantastic plumage of her mate's beautiful lyre-shaped tail was a thing to wonder at.

"He's handsome, and he knows it," she said with a sigh; and while he leapt from the ground to a branch at least ten feet above him, she showed them one of the "corraborees," or raised earth platforms, which he had built for himself to dance on.

"He flies from one to the other for hours at a time, dancing a few steps on each and showing himself off. But he's a good nest-builder—I must say that for him."

Phil looked at their nest, and thought it very fine. It was very large; dome-shaped, like the tiny wren's, it was roughly thatched with sticks and

The Other Side

moss. Inside, on a lining of soft feathers, one purple-grey egg reposed in state, all by itself.

"I never lay more than one," she said. "He thinks that quite enough."

"Come away—come away!" cried the Kangaroo at last. "The Piping Crows and the Cassowaries are waiting to see you, and then there are the Duckbill Platybus and the Spiny Ant-eater, to say nothing of Frilled Lizards and Tasmanian Devils!"

Long before Phil had seen all these, however, she was anxious to return to her beloved son.

"Don't you think that you could manage now by yourself?" she said. "I don't like to leave you, but Rufus will be thirsty, and—you are *sure* that you don't mind?" She hardly waited for him to answer before she was off and away, and Phil stood gazing after her with much sympathy, for he guessed that Rufus would be up to mischief.

It was evening now. The Kangaroo had left him on the borders of a forest, where giant gum

In Nature's School

trees clashed their strips of bark as the night wind rustled their mighty branches, and the thickets of Acacia were a quivering mass of scented blossom swaying in the moonlight.

The first thing that Phil noticed was a greenish-brown lizard on one of the branches—just an ordinary lizard, he seemed to him, and he gave him a gentle poke.

“Wake-up,” he said, “and tell me who you are.”

The Lizard did “wake-up,” and Phil actually jumped with surprise when, instead of the meek and inoffensive animal that he had believed him to be, he saw a fierce creature with a huge frill, some eight to ten inches in diameter, erected round his neck, eyes blazing, and a widely opened mouth that was outlined with red. His tongue and the linings of his throat were of a vivid yellow; and scarlet, and orange, and bright steel blue chased each other in that part of his frill which covered his neck and chest. On seeing Phil his anger gradually subsided.

The Other Side

“So it’s you, is it?” he said. “Why did you disturb me so? I was having a beautiful dream—hundreds of insects on one branch, and no trouble to get them.”

“What is that thing round your neck?” asked Phil, replying to one question by another.

The Lizard gradually allowed it to subside.

“It is what they call my ‘scare organ,’” he said. “I puff it up if any animal attempts to molest me, and so scare it off. Dogs will have nothing to say to me—they think I am ‘uncanny,’ and creep away with their tails between their legs, as if I were going to bite them. I wish I could!”

He ran excitedly, in an erect position, for a distance of fifteen yards, his hind legs widely separated, and his now drooping frill looking ridiculously like the wig of some undignified Lord Chancellor. Phil’s attention was suddenly distracted from him by extraordinary noises that came from the hollow stump of a tree close by. Snarling and snapping, and scolding each other in all but words, two

In Nature's School

jet-black creatures, splashed here and there with white, dashed out of the deep burrow they had made through the hollow, and continued their dispute above ground, though their blinking eyelids showed that they hated even so gentle a light as that of the moon. Phil had often heard how ugly a quarrel appeared to lookers on, but he had never quite realized it until now.

“These are Tasmanian Devils,” hissed the Lizard, whose frill was fully erect again, from the shelter of a high branch. “They live up to their name, for a more spiteful and ferocious set of creatures I have never heard of in all my life. Look at them now.”

They were not a pretty sight, as they bit and tore each other's throats. Phil quite believed the Lizard when he told him that the enormous havoc they wrought amongst sheep and poultry made the colonists their bitter foes.

He was glad to move away from the neighbourhood of their angry voices, and presently

The Other Side

found himself beside the banks of a wide river. Its shining depths mirrored the twinkling stars, and the soft lapping of the water was the only sound.

Here he met the Duckbill Platybus—one of the most extraordinary creatures, the night wind told him, to be found in any land. He was a small animal covered with thick brown fur; his body was long and narrow, his tail wide and flattened; and his feet, enormous for his size, had broad webbed toes, all armed with claws. On his fore-feet, which he used for digging as well as swimming, these were wide and blunt, and very powerful; on the hind feet they were pointed and very sharp. But it was the beak-like character of the Duckbill's mouth that made him so peculiar. This was flattened and broad, covered with a sensitive skin that looked like black velvet tipped and spotted with pink. When Phil came up to him he was busily engaged in rooting about the bank, filling his cheek pouches with a choice collection

In Nature's School

of water insects which he meant to eat at his leisure. On seeing him, the Duckbill stopped at once, and generously offered to share an unusually fat worm which he had just bitten in half. Phil was spared the pain of refusing him by the appearance of two young Duckbills, who jumped playfully on their father's back, and then rolled over like sportive kittens.

"Mother says," they cried, both speaking together, "that you're to bring HIM down to breakfast. She wants to show him over the house."

"The morning's my breakfast time," Phil explained hastily, hoping that he would not be offered any more worms, while the Duckbill swallowed a fat beetle as if it were a delicious oyster.

Mrs Duckbill met Phil on the threshold of the burrow, and bade him welcome with so much grace that he was reminded of the Lady Ondatra. She was rather smaller than her husband, and very sprightly.

"It's a treat to see a new face," she said, allow-

The Other Side

ing him to stroke her bill with evident pleasure.

“We are such stay-at-homes that few of our neighbours have any idea how distinguished we really are.”

The burrow through which she led him was very long and deep, and ended in a spacious chamber, furnished very plainly with a bed of dried weeds, roughly put together.

“It was here,” she said modestly, “that I laid my snow-white eggs, and sat upon them until they were hatched, as my pouch was not quite large enough to hold them. Such funny little things my babies were,” she continued, when she had shown him the second entrance to the burrow, which was well under water. “Not a single hair had they between them, and their soft little beaks you could have broken with one finger. They had a narrow escape, poor little mites, when I took them out for their first airing. We were playing on the river banks, when we were surprised by the owner of the salmon fisheries,

In Nature's School

who is always complaining that we disturb the spawn. Before I had time to get them away he seized them roughly, and they would have been lost to me for ever had it not been for my brave mate. When he saw what was happening he flew towards us, and made the spurs in his hind feet meet in the flesh of the thief's right hand. He dropped my babies with a cry of pain, and we all scampered off. We can move as quickly on land as we can under water, and once we reach our burrows no one can follow us."

The father Duckbill had joined them now, and, while he emptied his cheek pouches, Phil made his excuses and hurried off. The way that worm had wriggled had taken away his appetite; and it is always difficult to refuse well-meant hospitality without giving offence.

He had left the river bank some distance behind when he ran up against another queer animal, who was actively engaged in digging out an Ants' nest

The Other Side

“Good evening—good evening,” she said breathlessly, raising her plump little body, the hair of which was so thickly mingled with spiny quills that she might almost have been a porcupine. “I overslept myself, and am in a desperate hurry to get something to eat. I am generally up by dusk.”

Phil sat down and watched the earth fly round at each stroke of her claws. Very soon the nest was laid bare, and with every sign of keen enjoyment she licked up the succulent larvæ with her very long and slender tongue, calmly ignoring the ferocious ants.

“There!” she said, when her hunger was satisfied. “Now what do you want to know?”

“All about you,” replied Phil, promptly; but the Spiny Anteater, who meant to attack another Ant hill when she had got rid of Phil, laughed and shook her funny little head.

“That would take me too long,” she said, “but I’ll show you what we do when we fear danger.”

In Nature's School

And she promptly made herself into a ball like the hedgehog, and rolled away.

Phil thought that she had gone, but she came back in a moment with an unsteady shuffling gait, to show him the cunning little pouch where she carried her eggs, which she hatched by the heat of her body.

"If you watch me now," she said, "you'll see how quickly we can burrow. The colonists are far too fond of eating us, nicely baked, and as our dispositions are retiring we do not care for this."

As she spoke, she was digging the strong claws on each of her five-toed feet into the loose soil. They moved so quickly beneath her plump little body that she appeared to sink in the sand almost as though it were water, and in a moment or two was out of sight. Phil had had rather an exciting day, and began to feel very sleepy. So he was now glad to accept the invitation of a big brown bird who called to him from a tree near by, and amiably found him a place beside her nestlings. Here he slept

The Other Side

soundly, until his feathered companions responded to the first gleams of the morning sun with their usual notes of joyful greeting.

Many other strange beasts did Phil meet with as he wandered over the plains and through the bush, sleeping at night in some grassy hollow, or curled beside a Sugar Squirrel in the fork of a tree. He was interested in them all, but every day the longing for his own country grew stronger upon him; the bleating of the sheep in the pasture lands he sometimes skirted made him sick for "home."

This did not pass unnoticed by Nature, but there were other lessons that Phil had yet to learn, and the fierce heat of summer gave place to autumn before the night wind came. It was for the last time, and she sighed gently as she bore him over the sea; but Phil smiled in his sleep, for Nature had told him in his dreams that he would soon see England once more.

Chapter the Sixteenth

Home Again



WEET and clear came the song of a soaring lark to Phil as he slept under a May tree.

*Whit, whit, whit, whit, whit, whit, whee-ee—
No shoemaker can make boots for me-ee!
Why? why? why? why? why? why? why so?
Because my heel's as long as my toe-o!*

Higher and higher she winged her flight, singing as she rose, and Phil opened his eyes and looked about him. A field of buttercups like cloth of gold, spangled with star-white daisies, told him that he was back in England, and the merry little brook that tinkled its way over the stones in the ditch was a dear old friend of his.

The birds were holding festival. It was their wedding season, and as they flew from perfumed hawthorn to elm and beech there was a proud dis-

Home Again

play of new Spring finery. The little blue tit, intent upon charming his small mate, had borrowed the vivid tints of the forget-me-not; the reed-sparrow had thrown off the sober brown cap he had worn all through the winter, and his black crown shone with many colours as he moved his little head. Even cock-robin's breast glowed with a hue that was brighter than at any other time.

Close to Phil's elbow was the nest of the sky-lark; it lay low on the ground, behind two tussocks of coarse grass, and was fashioned daintily of twisted twigs. Scraps of moss and tufts of feathers had been used to line its smooth interior, and here, overshadowed by crowding field flowers anxious to share the sky-lark's secret, lay four white eggs dappled over with brown.

"Whit-whit-whit-whit-whit-whit-wee-ee," sang the lark again, falling from the blue of the heavens upon her speckled treasures. She gathered them close beneath her warm little body, and her liquid notes died away in a trill of blissful content.

In Nature's School

Phil sat very still, and waited until she turned her small bright eyes in his direction.

"Aren't you glad to be home again?" she asked. "Springtime in England—could any place in the world be lovelier than this?"

Phil looked across the meadow to a wooded hill. His roving eyes returned to an arch of beech trees, through which was a vision of blue-bells so exquisite in their beauty that it seemed to him no flowers of the tropics were half so fair.

"I am glad to be home," he said, at last, although he knew that the Orphanage, with its staring windows and prison gates might not be far away. It even amused him just then to think of it as another jungle, where he would find all sorts of animals awaiting him; with good tempers and bad tempers, and curious ways of their own that he would have to learn if he wanted to live with them in peace and quietness.

"And I shan't be frightened now," he thought, wishing that he could see Nature herself again, if

Home Again

only for a moment, that he might thank her for giving him such a happy year.

"There are a few hours of it left to you still," twittered the lark, as he told her his thoughts. "O! but the world is fair to-day."

She was thinking, he knew, of the little nestlings who would so soon be stirring under her wings, and he felt troubled lest harm should come to them.

"Wouldn't your nest be safer in a tree?" he asked; and the lark put her head on one side and looked at him quite patronisingly.

"Nature knows best," she said, "and it was she who told us to build it here. When my babies are hatched they will be a soft dull brown, spotted with buff, and so much the colour of withered grass that it will be impossible to distinguish them from it even a few feet away. They will be safe—so safe," she ended.

The sky-lark was too happy to have much to say, so Phil soon left her and entered the woods. The blue-bells were lovelier close at hand than in

In Nature's School

the distance; a missel-thrush carolled gaily from the topmost branch of a tree, and a flash of white on a sheltering bank drew Phil's attention to the rounded hole through which it disappeared. It was the back of a rabbit's tail, he knew, and without a second's hesitation he tried to follow the little creature; unfortunately, in his hurry he chose another hole. He had hardly gone more than two or three feet down it when he felt an indignant peck on his shoulder.

"Now then," said a stern voice, while two very black eyes glared at him angrily, "what are you doing here? This is *my* burrow now, for the rabbits have left it, and it is *my* nest on which you are trying to trample!"

Phil was amazed. An owl's nest in a rabbit warren? He had never heard of such a thing.

"I daresay not," said the brown owl, crossly. "But with all your wanderings you don't know much of bird life. There isn't a decent ruin for miles around, and the squirrels have taken posses-

Home Again

sion of all the hollow trees. So what else was left for me, pray?"

Phil's timid suggestion of "hedges" she met with scorn, and only melted into amiability when he spoke of her cousin, the Snowy Owl.

"If I thought I could fly so far, I would start off for Greenland myself," she said. "The way we are persecuted by gamekeepers here is simply terrible. The silly creatures say we kill young pheasants, but that's not true. We much prefer mice and rats, and smaller birds. If you are after rabbits you had better call next door."

"I wonder if she thinks I want to eat them?" smiled Phil to himself, as he tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the eggs on which she was sitting. He was met at the entrance to the hole "next door" by an old grey rabbit of imposing appearance, who stared at him in amazed anger, and stamped his forefeet. "Thud—thud"; it rang through the galleries, and frightened squeaks in the distance told that this sound was to the inhabitants of the burrow

In Nature's School

the signal of "bad news." The rabbit barred the passage with his body; the intruder should come no further, for who knew what designs he might not have on the young rabbits? In a moment, however, it occurred to him who Phil must be.

"I thought you had come to snare us," he said, "though I had never seen a boy so small. I shall be delighted to show you over. Pray come down."

With much ceremony he conducted him through the long galleries, past numerous "bolt holes" through which escape was possible if a ferret or weasel should pay a visit to the burrow. Young rabbits of every size whisked out of their way as they proceeded, and showed how readily they could disappear. Approaching somewhat nearer to the ground again, Sir Rabbit ushered Phil into a hollow cave near the surface.

"Here we rest from our labours," he remarked, grandly. "Our does have separate chambers, that their young may be undisturbed."

A little lady rabbit, with a funny habit of wrink-

Home Again

ling up her nose, came forward kindly and asked if Phil would like to visit a most interesting young family that had just arrived. Having received gracious permission from Sir Rabbit, Phil followed her to a short "stop," or single burrow, barely a yard below the earth's surface, where a gentle doe and a litter of young rabbits lay in the nest she had made for them with down plucked from her own breast. They were blind and hairless—not nearly so pretty as their small brothers and sisters who scampered about outside, Phil thought; but their mother was delighted with them.

"I shouldn't have a wish in the world," she murmured, "if I were not afraid of the badger. He has such a sharp nose that in some way he scents our nests, and digs them out with his powerful forepaws. A dish of young rabbits is his favourite food—and mine are so very sweet."

The look of fear in her mild soft eye was very piteous. Phil did his best to cheer her by telling her that he had never heard of a badger in those woods.

In Nature's School

He was rather thoughtful when he left the "stop," and nearly trod on a nest that a pair of enterprising robins had built in a tramp's old boot. They scolded him vigorously for quite two minutes, but relented when they saw his distress, although they could not stay to chat. It gave them enough to do to fill the five little gaping mouths that were always open, and cock-robin hurried off with his mate to find more grubs for their brood.

Under the shelter of an elm tree Phil discovered the pretty domed nest of a Chiffchaff. Through the opening in the side he could see how exquisitely the tiny builders had lined it with moss and feathers; but there were no white eggs mottled with grey, nor hungry fledglings, to reward the Chiffchaffs for all their labour.

"A boy came last night, and stole every single egg," explained a squirrel, running down from his "drey," or summer nest, which was planted, like Feathertail's, on the topmost branch of a tree. "And though the Lapwings only came down from

Home Again

the North this season, he robbed them too. They have been bewailing their loss all night—you can hear them still.”

It was a mournful cry:

Pee-weet! Pee-weet!

They've harried my nest, and gar'd me greet,

Pee-weet! Pee-weet!

and Phil felt very sorry for them. The male bird, the splendid crest he had put on to charm his lady-love entirely forgotten, fluttered sadly round the deserted nest, and his mate joined her voice with his in a sad “*Pee-weet.*”

But it was springtime, and in spite of the Lapwing's trouble there was joy in the very air. The Cuckoo, carrying in her beak the egg that she was going to put in a Pippit's nest, frisked her tail gaily as she crossed Phil's path, and a small brown Linnet piped out to him an invitation to come and see his nest on the common. He sat on Phil's shoulder and twittered to him as they crossed the field, telling him how cold the rains had been in March and April, and how he had had much

In Nature's School

ado with Mrs Linnet to keep up her spirits.

“But I knew that the sun would shine at last,” he cried, “and so it has!”

The gorse was in full bloom, and the linnets had built their nest in the centre of a yellow bush that was a mass of fragrant gold. On the top of this the cock bird perched, whistling a tune to announce his arrival; though this was not needed, for the little grey lady seated on the nest had watched his coming joyfully.

When Phil had looked at her eggs, and praised the way her nest was built, he became aware that a pair of long narrow eyes were surveying him quietly from a clump of rushes by the brook, which was singing merrily as ever. Seeing himself observed, the big Fox shook himself, and, with his splendid brush held high over his back, trotted across to Phil.

“So your year in Nature's school is nearly over?” he said regretfully. “I was hoping you would have come home in time to spend the winter with me. It

Home Again

was snug enough in my den, but game was scarce, and the hen roosts were too carefully guarded to please my fancy. Shall we go for a stroll? But first I will show you my two young cubs; they are bright little creatures, and sharp as needles."

The Fox's den was a deep burrow, or "earth," which he had scooped for himself in and out of the winding roots of a gnarled old oak. The entrance, some little distance from the tree itself, was hidden by a large stone and a clump of gorse.

Mr Reynard walked in briskly, and a slim Vixen, who had been sleeping with one eye open, as was her custom, sprang to her feet and seized the smallest of her snub-nosed little cubs by its neck, ready to carry it off at a moment's notice.

"It is quite all right, my dear," said Reynard soothingly, "this is a friend. When he has spoken to the children, I'm going to take him down to the plantation, and show him how I put the hounds off my scent."

"You had much better keep your own counsel,"

In Nature's School

she snapped. "A secret is never a secret when once it is told; and I don't want to be left to fend for myself directly the hunting season begins."

But Reynard knew well that Phil could be trusted; and when he had played for awhile with his babies, who were about as unlike young foxes as it was possible to be, he bade them an affectionate farewell and started off with Phil.

"If you were to take a walk with me in an ordinary way," he remarked, "my scent would cling to your clothes for months. You've noticed it already? It comes from some glands at the root of my tail, and wherever I go I leave my trail. It is to me a pleasing smell, but sometimes I find it most annoying."

Phil was not listening now. The afternoon sun was streaming redly through the pine trees in a blaze of light, and as he lifted his hand to shield his eyes a voice he knew well whispered in his ear. When he took his hand down again the Fox had gone, and Nature herself was standing beside him,



"He started off with Phil"

Home Again

in a fair green robe the colour of the forest trees.

“Good-bye, dear little Phil,” she cried. “Your year in my school has ended. You must go back now to the Orphanage, where, all the time that you have been with me, your ‘other self’ has been learning lessons and playing games. . . . Yet not ‘good-bye’—for you will be my child always, and in the depths of sorrow or the heights of joy you will hear my voice if you will but listen. Dear little Phil—farewell !”

“Farewell.”

The breeze caught up the echo as it died away, and a cloud passed over the sun. Very soberly Phil turned his footsteps towards the wood again, where the rabbits still played hide-and-seek amidst the bracken, and the birds were twittering as they built their nests.

Suddenly the white tail of a big bunny hoisted a signal of danger, and one and all vanished in a moment from the quiet scene.

“Here’s a BOY !” cried the Robins excitedly;

In Nature's School

and Phil, looking through the glade of blue-bells, saw Dick Brownlow half way up a sturdy tree. He was in the act of transferring five speckled eggs from a dainty nest into his cap.

"I say, don't take them all!" Phil cried, and Dick looked round without showing the least astonishment at seeing him there.

"All right," he answered, helping himself to one or two. "I suppose it is hard on the little beggars to leave them none. I believe there's a lark's nest somewhere near that stream—the cock bird made such a flutter when I went to look for tadpoles."

He scrambled down and linked his arm in Phil's as if they were bosom friends. As they strolled back to the Orphanage together he began to speak of things that had happened within the last few weeks, and Phil had a dim recollection of all he said. But how could he have possibly taken part in the football match of which Dick was talking when he had been away for a whole year? He could not

Home Again

understand. Dick was congratulating him on having made "the best half back for a youngster" that the school had known, and Phil's face glowed with pride in spite of his perplexity.

"And you were quite right about our having to play together if we wanted to win, though I was mad with you at the time for saying so," Dick added enthusiastically. "Who would have thought that such a duffer as you were when you first came would be a stunner at games? You'll be captain of the school before you leave, and a good one, too."

They had climbed the hill now, and the great iron gates of the Orphanage opened to let them through. Philip heard them clash behind him without a single misgiving, and passed into the midst of a group of boys who hailed him eagerly.

They all seemed much as he had left them, though some looked older. Their broad white collars were hardly so clean as they had been at the beginning of the day, but they looked rather nice, Phil thought, over their serge jackets. He

In Nature's School

felt for his own ; it was all on one side as usual, and he straightened it carefully, remembering how particular Mother Beaver had been about her young ones' neatness. His feet were cased in boots again, but he did not seem to mind, and he knocked at the door of the Matron's room without a doubt that she would be pleased to see him.

The Matron had altered a great deal—just how he could not tell at once. But when she spoke he noticed that her voice was softer, and she thanked him for the blue-bells he had gathered for her before he left the woods as if she were really glad to have them. Phil went back to the boys with a light heart, ready to meet, if need be, his enemy of old, and show him a brave front.

But Jack had gone.

“Don't you remember?” said Dick in a puzzled voice, for it seemed to him very strange that Phil should have forgotten. “They sent him away while you were ill. They thought you were dead at first, you know, when they found you in the

Home Again

woods, and the Matron nursed you herself. You talked a lot, and didn't know what you were saying. . . . They said you had brain fever, and we were jolly well sorry then that we had teased you so."

Phil felt more puzzled than ever. Which was the real "Phil," he wondered—the one who had stayed in the Orphanage, or that other, who had spent such a happy year in Nature's school? He was wondering still when the great bell rang for tea. A new "orphan" had just arrived—a pale little chap with frightened eyes who looked as miserable as Phil had done when first he came to the Orphanage.

"May he sit next to me?" Phil asked the Matron eagerly. She nodded in silence, an odd little smile playing about her lips, and Phil went over to the new comer with the protecting air that he had caught from Kamba.

"I'll tell you what to do," he whispered, "and we'll be friends. Do you like bull's-eyes? I've got

In Nature's School

some here, and to-morrow I'll show you how to cut whistles." And the small new boy was greatly comforted; for he, like Phil, had found a friend in his jungle.



SEP 9 1908



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 005 498 221 5

